TRAINING MASTER STUDENTS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE POSITIVE THINKING PROGRAMME IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract: *The topic of this study is based on the idea that school should be understood as a system with significant impact on the children`s well-being. Consequently, Therefore, school must act so as to provide an optimal educational climate that allows students to achieve the appropriate academic performance, considering and responding to their emotional and social needs (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). We found out that primary school pupils face complex problems generated by the current socio-economic and cultural context that strongly influences family, the mass media quality, the community as an educative environment, and show real difficulty in identifying an appropriate response to develop their well-being. This aspect has motivated us to propose a training program for master students in the field of education sciences through which they would develop their investigative and educational intervention competences on the school and classroom climate in order to increase the pupils` well-being as a relevant factor in optimizing learning.*

Keywords: *Master students; well-being; positive thinking; formative programme;*

Conceptual delimitations:
The differences between people in terms of their mental well-being, emotional health, and personal ability are largely determined by the structure of their personality, biological factors, family relationships, personal history, and exposure to life events. These components and their interactions are also affected by the environment, the individual`s early interaction with the educational environment is an important factor in the development of the child`s health and well-being. Over the years, most studies have focused primarily on the contribution of one single variable to the achievements (Greenwood, 1996; Wentzel, 1993), rather than an integrated contribution of learning factors. Educational performances were considered to be influenced by personal factors such as cognitive ability and motivation for achievement, environmental factors such as classroom climate, learning processes, and

student-centered teaching methods (Chen, Hwang, Yeh & Lin, 2012). On the other hand, carrying out research while ignoring the complexity of teaching and learning in their natural environment can create a gap between theory and practice. Admitting that this gap can occur is not new in the study of education (Patten & Newhart, 2017). Considering this aspect, the study focuses on the meaning of positive thinking and tackles the impact of a positive thinking programme in schools on the students` academic achievements and optimal educational climate. Positive thinking creates positive feelings and leads to an active and comfortable adaptation to reality. In the same way that we convince ourselves that we cannot do anything, we can convince ourselves that we are capable of doing certain things (Seligman, 2002). There is a constant relationship between thinking and emotion, body and behaviour.

Theoretically, there are two types of thinking that can be considered in this context: optimistic thinking, which refers to the positive aspects of reality and regards goals and purposes with hope, unlike the pessimistic thinking that chooses the negative aspects of reality and sometimes leads to despair. The theoretical foundation of the study is carried out from the perspective of the paradigm of positive psychology which refers to optimal functioning of individuals and groups and to factors promoting positive emotions (Gable & Haidt, 2005), positive features, self-achievement and success (Seligman, 2010). Positive psychology has its origins in the humanist psychology (Rogers, 1980), which has been reconsidered lately. Positive psychology focuses on ways to improve the quality of life and optimal personal functioning to bring about individual and social changes (Gable & Haidt, 2005). It is based on the belief that people naturally aspire to live a meaningful and self-fulfilling life, to cultivate the best things in themselves and to enhance their experiences in love, work and play. It focuses on personal development, emphasizing the importance of identifying meaning and satisfaction in life (Seligman, 2002). Positive psychology develops three main aspects:

- *Positive emotions* that refer to past satisfactions, present happiness and hope for the future;
- *Positive personality traits* - developing each person`s potential, such as the potential for love and work, courage, compassion, creativity, curiosity, honesty, self-appraisal, moderation, self-control and wisdom (Bryan, Mathur & Sullivan, 1996).
- *Positive behaviours* - emphasizing the strong points of better communities such as justice, responsibility, good parents, work ethics, leadership, teamwork, goal setting and tolerance.

The educational system has started to explore this area, considering the advances in positive psychology and studies that clearly demonstrate the acquired ability of positive thinking.

Seligman, M. () tries to apply his experience in the field of positive psychology in education as well. He believes that applying positive psychology in education can reduce feelings of insecurity and depression in children. Seligman uses his PERMA model (the five elements of well-being) to teach in schools and to help students achieve well-being and growth:

P – Positive emotions: Experiencing positive emotions such as happiness, gratitude, interest, hope;

E - Engagement: Being fully involved in activities that require your abilities and challenge you;

R – Relationships: Development of positive relationships;

M - Meaning: Involvement in a deep goal that you assign a special significance:

A - Achievement: Pursuing success, achieving performance and continence.

Clonan, S.M. and colleagues (2004) noticed that the application of positive psychology in educational environments contributed to the consolidation of individual strengths. It had a prevention role, promoted the development of a positive school climate and increased students' chances of success. Positive education has also proven to have a lasting impact on the potential to change student behaviour.

Traditional approaches to school psychology and educational counselling have focused in the past on alleviating deficiencies, problems and negative aspects. Attention has often been given to the problem, the pathology, and elements that encourage personal growth and promote mental well-being have been ignored. The positivist model, which currently guides psycho-educational interventions in schools, highlights the values of well-being, optimism, personal satisfaction, hope and happiness.

Today, it is becoming increasingly clear that effective educational programs are not those that seek to correct pupils' weaknesses and deficiencies, but programs that promote positive efficiency, autonomy and self-achievement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

1.   Questions

The research question is:

How do primary school teachers, who are master students as well, perceive the activities conducted with children aged 8-10 in terms of the 5 PERMA states of well-being?

2. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to involve master students in identifying learning situations that can be correlated with the PERMA model to develop an intervention program that promotes positive emotions and strengthens positive qualities, self-achievement and success in the school where they work. We have started from the premises that if teachers are aware of the elements involved in well-being, then the possibility to facilitate the children`s well-being, the development and the academic performance is increased.

3. Research Methods

a. **The subjects.** This study involved 28 female primary school teachers from Arad, Timiş, Caras-Severin, all Master students in the field of education sciences. In terms of their age, 17% of participants are between 20-30 years old, 53% of participants are between 31-40 years old, 28% of participants are between 41-50 year. The subjects have between 1 and 25 years of experience in teaching, the average being of 14.92 years.

b. Methods and instruments. The subjects, master students, participants in the internship program in school completed a questionnaire to identify the frequency with which they feel that they involve students in activities to cultivate their well-being based on the PERMA model. The questionnaire contains a total of 15 items grouped on the five elements of well-being. Subjects can respond on a scale of 1 (I never or almost never do this) to 4 (I always or almost always do this). An average score can be calculated for both the entire scale and the five factors, separately. The case study method will be used by each master student to observe and characterize the intervention and the effects of the positive thinking program implemented on the state of well-being, on the students' performance and the climate of the classroom and of school. All case studies will have the following structure: Case limitations; Complexity, diversity and depth of the case; Development variables anchored in time and place; Connecting the case to the environment in which it operates, Development decisions.

4. Findings

Descriptive statistics indicated a low level of frequency of activities with an impact on the students` well-being that the teachers participating in the study identified initially. As it results from the analysis of the data presented in Table no 1, for the components: Relationships, Meaning, Achievement teachers do not systematically involve students in learning situations.

	Never	Once or twice	On most days	Every day
Positive emotions	9,6%	17,3%	26,7%	46,4%
Engagement	12,3%	18,1%	24,4%	47,2%
Relationship	54,5%	9,8%	12,7%	23,1%
Meaning	56,4%	17,1%	15,2%	13,2%
Achievement	52,1%	24,3%	11,8%	11,8%

Table no 1: *The teacher indicated frequency on the activities that develop the primary students` well-being throughout a week*

Based on the analysis of responses and on the awareness of the positive psychology-based intervention models, each student has developed a personalized positive learning program for the community, school, and pupils they work with. Thus, 28 programs were developed to stimulate positive thinking, built on the cognitive, emotional and social capacities according to the pupils' age, the age-related problems they face and the typical life situations for their age. The activities in the program differ from the "ordinary" lessons, each student completes a personal journal to get to know themselves and each other better. These programs focus on learning interpersonal and intra-personal skills such as self-awareness and self-management, self-control, empathy, assertiveness, problem solving, decision-making, and fighting stress and change. These programs are currently being applied in schools and each student in the subject sample will develop a case study that examines the impact of this program on performance and the classroom educational climate. During these activities, students know each other better, identify their strengths and things that make them feel better and happier.

Conclusions

This study highlights the fact that improvement interventions in schools can be achieved by raising awareness on problems, changing attitudes and strategies, applying current theoretical models to educational practice.

The activities carried out with the 28 students, teachers in primary education, underline the importance of self-analysis of the teacher's own ways of acting when it comes to the well-being of students and the awareness of the possibilities of practical intervention in school based on theoretical models and positive education guides.The study also highlights the particular importance of the teachers` joint work of teachers, as a learning team that structures its practice for quality enhancement and

continuous improvement of training.Another important conclusion of this study is that in order to be successful in implementing the positive thinking program in schools, teachers should be trained in the awareness of certain practices specific to positive education where they believe are not so good at.

The next phase of the study will consist of producing and presenting case studies based on the results of the pupils in the classes where the positive thinking program has been implemented. These case studies will contribute with qualitative data to demonstrate whether there is a link between positive thinking, progress in academic achievement, and educational climate. By participating in the ameliorative research, through the continuous sharing of knowledge and positive experiences from activity to class, the students participating in the internship program can improve their professional image and motivation, feel a personal sense of well-being, subjective well-being - improving the way they see themselves. The ultimate goal is to disseminate the results of this study so as to introduce positive thinking programs into schools as an integrated part of the curriculum.

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