

UNIVERSITATEA DE VEST DIN TIMIȘOARA
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TEZĂ DE ABILITARE

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LUȘTREA ANCA, Conf.univ.dr.

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**Programe de sprijin și consiliere în educația incluzivă: Intervenții
psihopedagogice, formare și dezvoltare profesională**

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REZUMATUL TEZEI DE ABILITARE

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Field of study: Educational Sciences

HABILITATION THESIS

Support and counseling programs in inclusive education: Specific interventions, training and professional development

Anca Luștea, Associate Professor

ABSTRACT

The habilitation thesis, *Support and Counseling Programs in Inclusive Education: Specific interventions, training, and professional development*, presents a summary of my academic, scientific, and professional career over the past 15 years, starting in 2009, the year I obtained my PhD with the thesis *The effect of learning strategies on students' motivation* at Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, up to the present.

During this period, I have carried out my professional activity within the West University of Timișoara, contributing scientifically, didactically, and institutionally to the professional training of future specialists in educational sciences.

From a scientific perspective, I have published 54 articles in national and international journals and books; I serve as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Educational Sciences*; I have contributed as a reviewer for numerous international and national journals; and I have participated in national and international conferences.

From a didactic perspective, together with my colleagues or as a program coordinator, I have designed the curriculum for the *Special Education* and *Counseling and Educational Inclusion* programs, and I have taught courses in the field of Special and Inclusive Education.

From an institutional perspective, I have been involved in the implementation of national and international research and institutional development projects. I coordinated the bachelor's program in *Special Education* (2017–2018) and currently coordinate the master's program in *Educational Counseling and Inclusion* (2019–present). I was also a founding member and active contributor to three UVT centers: the *University Clinic for Psychopedagogical Therapies and Counseling*, the *Center for Psychopedagogical Assistance and Interventions*, and the *EduMentor Lab*.

This habilitation thesis is structured in two main parts: the first presents the original scientific contributions resulting from research and teaching activities, grouped into three areas of professional development; the second part presents evidence of my competence to coordinate research teams and to manage and organize teaching activities.

My professional activity has been guided by the constant objective of contributing to the initial and continuing training of teachers who work with students with disabilities, in a coherent and integrated manner. I have pursued this goal through the careful integration of the didactic dimension, applied research, institutional engagement, and services provided to the educational community. In this thesis, I have presented this contribution in an integrated manner, structured around three major directions of professional development.

The first direction refers to *Specific interventions in the inclusive classroom*, in the context of the expanding phenomenon of inclusion and the need for initial and continuing training of teachers working in inclusive settings. My approach to teacher training in inclusive education aligns with the integrative model, a systematic and coherent approach to inclusion, where the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for inclusive teaching are embedded across all courses and specializations within *Educational Sciences* and the *Teacher Training Module*. This model includes competencies in curriculum adaptation, as well as knowledge of diversity and social inclusion strategies, while emphasizing critical reflection and practical training for teaching in diverse and inclusive contexts. Teaching activities must be supported by scientific evidence; this is why I have conducted research, implemented institutional development projects, and proposed courses in both initial and continuing teacher training that contribute to developing teachers' ability to design and implement psychological and educational interventions in inclusive (and special) classrooms.

The aims of the research in this area were: to analyze teachers' attitudes toward school inclusion in order to identify preventive solutions during initial training; to determine the most effective curriculum adaptation strategies applicable to the Romanian educational context; and to analyze the effectiveness and characteristics of various psychological and educational interventions in cases involving hearing impairments, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or emotional and behavioral disorders. In this regard, I pursued professional development by participating in training modules in inclusive education. I also carried out activities through international institutional development projects and supported continuing education modules for teachers through postgraduate programs.

The second direction of professional development focuses on *Educational counseling in contexts of diversity and inclusion*. The training of specialists in this field is increasingly relevant. In Romania, the shortage of school counselors has become a concern, especially given the rise in bullying cases. Although the authorities have initiated measures to address the shortage, the current number of counselors remains

insufficient. In this context, the initial and continuing training of school counselors is strategically important, and the master's program in *Counseling and Educational Inclusion* (CIE), which I coordinate, plays a direct role in preparing future counselors to meet the complex demands of today's educational landscape.

Therefore, I presented how my involvement in scientific research, various projects, training and community support programs has contributed to the professional development of school counselors.

The research goals in this area were: to identify effective strategies to empower teachers to support students through counseling; to explore ways of counseling adults for professional development and well-being; and to determine effective approaches for learning-related counseling, including for students with disabilities. In this direction, I have been involved in numerous institutional development projects in which I provided tutoring and counseling services to UVT students, as well as professional development for university teachers aimed at improving their capacity to support students in their learning processes.

The FDI project *Developing an Inclusive, Accessible, and Sustainable Educational Environment at the West University of Timișoara for Students with Disabilities*, which I coordinate, has provided me the opportunity to collaborate within the university to design support services for students with disabilities. Through these efforts, I believe I have contributed both to the development of counseling competencies among future specialists and to the improvement of counseling services in schools and universities.

The third direction of professional development is represented by *Strategies for developing professional and transversal skills through initial and continuing training programs*. This section presents research, institutional development projects, and community initiatives aimed at equipping students in Educational Sciences and teachers with a relevant and up-to-date competence profile. The quality of teacher training must reflect not only pedagogical, didactic, and assessment skills, but also the ability to adapt to educational change, implement inclusive strategies, and use innovative teaching methods. This should foster a reflective mindset, the ability to manage classroom diversity, and readiness for lifelong learning, so that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of students in a dynamic educational system.

My research in this area aimed to explore students' perceptions of their competence profiles, roles, and responsibilities in order to design appropriate educational programs; to determine the most effective teaching strategies, including those adapted to online learning environments, that support collaboration in diverse or interdisciplinary contexts; and to identify the best approaches to training students in transversal and internationalization skills. I believe that through the international projects in which I participated—and particularly through the international interdisciplinary course *Classroom Laboratory*—I have offered students modern learning opportunities aligned with labor market demands. Moreover, through the *EduMentor Lab* initiative, I have contributed to supporting novice teachers in their early careers through a mentoring program dedicated to those working in special and inclusive education.

In the second part of the thesis, I presented arguments supporting my qualifications for coordinating research teams. In summary, I have developed and demonstrated these skills as coordinator of the *Special Education Research Department at the University Clinic for Psychopedagogical Therapy and Counseling*; as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Educational Sciences*; as director of an international research project representing UVT; as reviewer for international journals indexed in WoS and BDI; as organizer of international and national conferences; and as a member of professional and research associations.

Regarding the management of the teaching activities, I have coordinated both the bachelor's program in *Special Education* and the master's program in *Counseling and Educational Inclusion*. I have taught core courses such as *Fundamentals of special education* and *Didactics of special and inclusive education*, proposed new subjects such as *Counseling for inclusion*, delivered continuing professional development modules through postgraduate programs, and conducted interactive workshops for teachers in special and inclusive education.

Future directions of academic development include four major areas. Didactically, I propose to expand the topic of teaching in inclusive classes beyond the disciplines already included in the Department of Educational Sciences curriculum. Thus, I intend to develop and deliver courses or learning units focused on inclusive classroom teaching within teaching master's programs, postgraduate and continuous training programs aimed at middle and high school teachers across various disciplines. In the area of institutional projects, I propose facilitating teacher training focused on developing inclusive teaching skills delivered by national and international experts. I also aim to increase the relevance of my research by setting up mixed research teams composed of academics, students, teachers, and practitioners engaged in action research focused on the real needs of inclusive schools. I further propose disseminating research results in high-impact journals but also in Romanian, using multimedia formats such as webinars, podcasts, and social media dissemination. In the area of social impact, I aim to consolidate the activities offered through EduMentor Lab as a support platform for teachers in inclusive schools, educational counselors, and educational managers, through mentoring, professional supervision, and networking activities.

In conclusion, over the course of more than two decades, my teaching activity has consistently focused on providing in-depth, relevant, and inclusive training to future education specialists, maintaining a balance between theoretical grounding, practical experience, and international perspective. By combining expertise in special education, a commitment to didactic innovation, and ongoing involvement in supporting the professional community, I have aimed not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate a collaborative, reflective, and practice-oriented educational culture. This integrated and flexible approach

constitutes, in essence, my contribution to the continuous development and professionalization of students and teachers in the field of special and inclusive education.