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Theoretical Aspects of the Appreciative Intelligence of Teachers in Higher Education

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Abstract: Appreciative intelligence is the ability to identify the qualities and positive aspects of a person, and to harness them. In this article the concept of appreciative intelligence is analyzed, the relationship between this concept and appreciative inquiry is highlighted, syntheses are made regarding the connection of appreciative intelligence with other types of intelligence, such as emotional intelligence and adaptive intelligence.
In the educational field, the appreciative intelligence of the teacher consists of essential components of different approaches: appreciative inquiry (research), appreciative advising, and appreciative analytical mindset. Appreciative inquiry represents the process of optimizing success within the educational institution, through appreciative methods. Appreciative advising provides a framework of improvement of communication process between students and teacher and supporting students in order to achieve the desired results. Appreciative analytical mindset defined as a thinking system focused on searching for the best aspects of a person. The article describes the concept of appreciative intelligence, being presented different acceptances and opinions of the researchers. Appreciative intelligence is the ability to see the generative potential in any situation and actualize it. Teachers with high appreciative intelligence are able to visualize and create small sequential steps that build on each other, creating momentum for changing the behavior of students, which results in positive outcomes. Appreciation is defined as a self-explanatory behavioral construct of goodwill that brings positive influences over time in the teaching-learning-assessment process.

Keywords: *appreciation; appreciative advising; appreciative intelligence; appreciative inquiry; multiple intelligence*

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1. Introduction

After the 2000s, a new type in the category of multiple intelligences that is advancing in research is appreciative intelligence. The hypothesis of the existence of appreciative intelligence is consistent with the theory of multiple intelligences, formulated by Howard Gardner, as a deconstruction of the idea of human intelligence. Appreciative intelligence represents the individual's ability to sense the inherent positive in different people and different situations, choosing the positive perspectives of development and the way from the strong points of the present, to the identified positive purpose. Appreciative intelligence is one of the skills increasingly in demand in the context of multiple crises and social changes. In this article the concept of appreciative intelligence is analyzed, the relationship between this concept and appreciative inquiry is highlighted, syntheses are made regarding the connection of appreciative intelligence with other types of intelligence, such as emotional intelligence and adaptive intelligence. Starting from the theoretical background, an attempt was made to define the components and characteristics of appreciative intelligence in university teaching staff.

2. Theoretical Background

The intelligence is a very complex construct. The interest areas of researchers focus on the concept of „intelligent intelligences", which includes practical, social and emotional intelligence. Social intelligence is the capacity to know oneself and to know others. By understanding ourselves and other people, we can find ways to collaborate for mutual benefits. In this sense, teaching staff must possess social intelligence in abundance. In order to motivate students, teachers build relationships and inspire them to want to do what needs to be done. In this context, appreciation is one of the foundations of creating effective relationships. Appreciative intelligence of teachers is the ability to identify the qualities, the positive aspects of students and to harness them in educational process. A. Sandu affirms that appreciative intelligence is the synthesis of the types of social intelligence aimed at identifying the positive, identifying the development potentials and ways of updating them (2009, p. 120). The teacher has the role of focusing his thinking on the positive aspects and recognizing the student's potential, guiding them towards achieving the educational objectives.

When appreciation is communicated, there is a validation of emotions between people, such as the teacher and the student, there is strengthening emotional connections and personal loyalty. Thus, a

relationship between emotional intelligence and appreciative intelligence is attested. One of the pioneers of positive psychology, B. Fredrikson (2001) supports the idea that people who experience negative emotions are more restricted in their possibilities of thinking and action, are more inclined to a narrow perspective, while people who experience positive emotions have a broader perspective on the possibilities or opportunities for thinking and action. When positive appreciation prevail, people are more receptive to the needs of those around them and are more emotionally available to start effective interpersonal relationships.

The analysis of the concept of appreciative intelligence starts from the theory of *appreciative inquiry* developed in the United States by D. Cooperrider. Appreciative Inquiry is both a worldview and a process for facilitating positive change in human systems. The basic assumption is that in every human system something works right and contains certain elements that make it vital, effective and successful (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Appreciative Intelligence based on appreciative inquiry model supports a strengths-based and transformative strategic change process focused on leadership development and organizational change. Appreciative intelligence is the ability of individuals to appreciate the positive, while the appreciative inquiry is the specific human and organizational development methodology centered on the appreciation of the positive. In educational field, appreciative intelligence of teachers consists of the ability to adopt a growth mindset in which they can frame their perspective toward a vison of possibility, to see what emerges from something much smaller or from a current state in students and processes. Appreciative Intelligence is the ability to see the generative potential of students within any given educational situation. In this regard, appreciative inquiry is a methodology that helps teachers to focus upon what is working well, the positive core, and identifying strengths by engaging them in inquiries and stories that highlight and then leverage those strengths. Key appreciative strategies include: 1) reframing problems into possibilities and threats into opportunities; 2) seeing the strengths and successes of individuals, groups, and organizations; and 3) increasing curiosity and removing judgment. These strategies help individuals and systems shift their paradigm from a deficit-based perspective to a growth or strength-based perspective (Armstrong et al., 2020).

Through the prism of positive psychology, appreciative intelligence is the ability to perceive individuals and situations with potential for success and the strategies needed to update them. Appreciative intelligence presents personal characteristics such as perseverance, innovative spirit, creativity,

persuasion, ability to involve people in personalized or educational projects. People who possess appreciative intelligence have the ability to identify the positive element in any situation, demonstrate flexibility and adaptability to new situations, quickly reconfigure their perspectives to new realities. The authors T. Tatchenkery and C. Metzker (2006) states that „appreciative intelligence means conscious or unconscious reframing, identification of positive elements through selection and value judgment, and seeing how the future unfolds". In authors view appreciative intelligence is the ability to connect and expand the intelligence degree from a set of intelligences, being a kind of meta-intelligence.

In positive psychology, appreciative intelligence is defined by highlighting its difference from appreciative mindset. Appreciative mindset is the system of thinking centered on appreciation and valorization that allows the person to adapt to the social reality in accordance with the elements of maximum efficiency allowed by the social systems and to transform these systems according to its own aspirations and potentialities. Thinking is a psychic mechanism in the concept of intelligence. Intelligence is used for thinking, but it is not reduced or confused with it. Thinking is a part of intelligence, one of its forms, which helps it to adapt to reality. But intelligence involves more than that. In Sternberg's conception, intelligence is not just a simple factor g, but represents a complex construct of skills and attitudes, such as the following: analytical skills and attitudes; practical skills and attitudes; creative skills and attitudes; wisdom-based skills and attitudes (Sternberg et al., 2021). By analogy with those noted by R. Sternberg, in educational field, teachers and students need to think creatively to generate solutions to problems different from those to which they are accustomed; think analytically to understand the problems and evaluate their solutions; think practically to implement solutions of problem and convince others of their value; and think wisely to ensure that their ideas benefit others beside themselves and their allies.

In the educational practice, the focus has been shifted from action research, focused on problem solving, to appreciative research that focuses on the positive and what works (see Table 1). With this transition, appreciative inquiry offers a positive perspective of teaching – learning process, focusing attention on what is possible, rather than what is wrong.

Table 1. Action research and appreciative research/inquiry in educational context

Action research		Appreciative research/inquiry
Identifying problems and their causes	Purpose	Appreciation and valorization of the positive aspects that produce the desired change
In the institution there are problems to be solved	Metaphor	In the institution there are strengths to be discovered
Methods for analyzing errors, problems and their causes	Methods	Methods of identifying the positive elements and strengths
The research is realized by the teacher	Management	The research is realized by the teacher and students
The decision is made vertically, from the teacher to the students	Decisions making	The decision is made vertically, from the teacher to the students and horizontally, between teacher and students

Source: Author's own conception

Thus, appreciative intelligence involves the application of the principles and methodology of appreciative research in order to change in a positive direction. Change is a process necessary for adaptation to the external conditions of the socio-cultural environment. People with high appreciative intelligence recognize that they are part of the environment or the world, they understand connections between themselves and the world around them, they see the circular process of their actions affecting people and situations around them. In this context, R. Sternberg (2021) brings into view the concept of *adaptive intelligence*. Appreciative intelligence leads to change by developing the positive aspects of people, and adaptive intelligence leads to the adaptation of behavior according to the demands of the natural or socio-cultural environment. R. Sternberg define adaptive intelligence as the intelligence one needs to adapt to current problems and to anticipate future problems of real-world environments. In the educational field, especially during the recent pandemic of COVID19, both teachers and students had to show appreciative and adaptive intelligence, in order to comply with the new educational requirements but also to focus on their best aspects in order to achieve the educational objectives. In this sense, appreciative intelligence involves two approaches: an intrapersonal approach, focusing on identifying one's own strengths and positive aspects in order to achieve the proposed objectives and achieve change, and an

interpersonal approach, focusing on identifying the strengths of others (students, teachers) in order to achieve educational objectives, to change and to make adaptation to the environment. People with appreciative intelligence respond to – and invent – their environment. What are the distinct aspects of appreciative intelligence in the educational field? Is the appreciative intelligence of teaching staff one of the multiple intelligences, from social intelligence and adaptive intelligence, or is it a set of skills and attitudes?

3. Characteristics of Appreciative Intelligence in Educational Context

3.1. Problems and Contradictions

Appreciative intelligence is a new concept launched in the literature, which implies ambiguities and difficulties in the correct interpretation of the meaning of the term. A problem is the lack of tools to measure the appreciative intelligence of teachers, both in the university and pre-university cycle. The construction of these psychodiagnostics tools (tests, scales, questionnaires) would involve difficulties in the fine demarcation between appreciative intelligence and the other types of intelligence, such as emotional intelligence.

I mentioned before that appreciative intelligence is the ability to see the other's potential and transform it, to identify the positive aspects and develop them. In teaching practice, the teacher is in different situations, which involves not only highlighting the positive, but also analyzing the students' mistakes and errors, which need to be corrected and reduced. In this case, does the teacher possess appreciative intelligence or not? I consider that the appreciative intelligence of the teaching staff involves focusing on the strengths and identifying the student's potential for his transformation, but also other appreciative capacities necessary in different situations, such as identifying errors, analyzing the causes of mistakes in learning, finding solutions to solve problems.

Another contradiction derives from the typology of the appreciative research process. Thus, in the last decades, two models of appreciative research have emerged:

1. 4D model: Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny, proposed by D. L. Cooperrider and D. Whitney (2005);
2. 4I model: Initiated, Inquire, Image, Innovate, proposed by J. M. Watkins, B. J. Mohr, and R. Kelly (2011).

Both models are directed towards identifying positive aspects in the organization, rather than solving problems. In this context, P. J. Rogers and D. Fraser argue that appreciative research is relevant in certain situations

when the purpose of assessment is not to identify unknown problems, but to identify strengths (Rogers & Fraser, 2003).

The didactic process must be reconsidered as a partnership between teacher and student, where both communicate, provide positive feedback, observe their strengths and evaluate themselves according to the criteria set out at the beginning of the teaching and learning process. Such a state of affairs allows the analysis of the specifics of appreciative intelligence in university teaching staff.

3.2 Definitions of Appreciative Intelligence

Appreciative intelligence is the ability to identify the qualities and positive aspects of a person in different situations and to harness them. Studies in positive psychology outline a new perspective on appreciative intelligence. In consensus with the ideas promoted by Martin E. P. Seligman (2002), who focuses on the strengths and virtues that help people succeed in life, states that appreciative intelligence is the ability to see positive aspects in people, to emphasize positive emotions, to develop their talent and / or potential.

Appreciative intelligence is the ability to unite, sublime and expand the intelligence from a wide range of well-known intelligences, namely: linguistic, non-linguistic and person-centered, being basically a kind of meta intelligence, bringing together all kinds of intelligence in for constructive purposes (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006). In another sense, the appreciative intelligence represents the ability to reflect and perceive generative potential in difficult situations, and engage in intentional actions to transform potential into positive results (Thatchenkery et al., 2010).

From a theoretical perspective, appreciative intelligence focuses on the *ability to redefine the context, the power to identify positive elements and the identification of future scenarios* (how it can influence the current situation in the future) (Thatchenkery & Matzker, 2006). When one of the mentioned elements is missing or does not proceed normally, this construction could be considerably affected. Appreciative intelligence cannot exist without its three active elements which are interdependent and create a marked symbiosis for the person. Each individual element is an important cognitive process for the manifestation of appreciative intelligence.

a) *Reframing* is the change in the perspective through which things are perceived, the redefinition of the framework is seen as a psychological process by which a person changes the perspective under which he considers an object, a person or a social context. Reframing is a process of redefining the framework of the problem into the challenge for

development. Reframing is the process of changing perceptions by changing stimuli which are given attention to. Reframing requires seeing something in a new way, in a context that allows us to recognize and appreciate positive aspects of our situation.

b) *Appreciating the positive* means to identify the positive in people, events, situations, to focus on the positive elements (affirmative) out of the totality of elements of a social phenomenon. In the view of Thatchenkery and Matzker (2006) the appreciation of the positive is the selectivity and the judging of the positive value of something specific. The appreciative state is a mental condition of availability for valorization and recognition of the positive in individuals, organizations, or even situations that people face (Sandu, 2017).

c) *Noticing the evolution of the future* represents the ability to make connections between the generative aspects of the present and the desired future. The positive elements that may be the prerequisites for the construction of a desired future situation exist in a particular form at present, and the person possessing the appreciative intelligence is able to link the existing resources to the desired state of affairs (Thatchenkery & Matzker 2006). Time management, sketching a prognostic plan are indispensable elements that refer to the appreciation of the person. In other words, the lack of a perspective plan in actions or thinking does not present values if they are not consistently correlated.

T. Thatchenkery and C. Metzker (2006) highlight the qualities of people who possess appreciative intelligence:

- *persistence*, which is a quality influenced by self-esteem, represents the pre- disposition to persevere motivationally towards achieving a predetermined goal, finding the personal resources necessary to overcome the obstacles;
- *self-efficacy*, implies the belief in his / her abilities to mobilize the cognitive and motivational resources necessary for the successful accomplishment of the established tasks;
- *tolerance for uncertainty* or risk management, results from visualizing how positive future could unfold from the present;
- *irrepressible resilience* - the ability to bounce back from a difficult situation — as a result of reframing, seeing what was positive in the situation, and understanding that a better future could come about despite a crisis or setback.

In this sense, *appreciative intelligence is a set of skills, personal qualities and attitudes that allow solving any type of problem by identifying the positive in person, group or situation.*

3.3 Components of Appreciative Intelligence of University Teachers

As previously presented, appreciative intelligence is a complex construct, consisting of skills, attitudes and personal qualities necessary for the teaching staff to achieve the didactic process, valuing the positive aspects of the students, his personal positive aspects and the created educational context.

The concept of appreciative intelligence is extended in the model of appreciative education, proposed by Jennifer L. Bloom and Jeffrey L. McClellan (2016), according to which appreciative education is determined by three factors - AI (Appreciative Inquiry), AA (Appreciative Advising) and AM (Appreciative Mindset), AI + AA + AM = Appreciative Education (AE), where:

- Appreciative inquiry represents the process of optimizing success within the educational institution, through appreciative methods;
- Appreciative advising provides a framework of improvement of communication process between students and teacher and supporting students in order to achieve the desired results;
- Appreciative mindset defined as a thinking system focused on searching for the best aspects of a person.

According to the authors, appreciative education is a framework for educators to embrace positive mindsets, enhance learners' assets and strengths, and empower learners to take ownership of the learning process for their academic success (Bloom et al., 2008).

In this context, appreciative intelligence is constituted by:

1. appreciative research skills;
2. appreciative communication and advising skills;
3. appreciative analytical skills.

Appreciative research skills presuppose the application of appreciative methods in order to enhance the positive experiences of the actors involved in the educational process to produce change. Appreciative methods aim to identify, understand and increase the positive aspects. In appreciative research the following methods are used more often: interview, focus group, SOAR method.

The interview involves analyzing the experiences of the students in the training process, identifying the positive and successful elements from them and focusing the interview on them. The appreciative interview is based on an interview guide focused on affirmative topics and consists of asking the positive questions. A positive question is affirmative, which is

directed towards identifying the qualities, the positive aspects of a person. Positive questions lead to learning from past experiences and understanding of the project and future goals (Whitney et al., 2002).

The essence of the questions in an appreciative interview consists of their characteristics: motivation, positive character, future-oriented vector. Thus, the questions should motivate the student to seek new information, to be sceptical of different ideas and opinions. Any question must have a positive character, which stimulates creative answers, new solutions and possibilities for developing the potential. It is also necessary for the questions to be oriented to the future, so that the student can design the results and the action plan (Bîrnaz & Botezatu, 2020).

The appreciative focus group is the result of the combination of focus group and appreciative interview. Focus group implies the creation of a focus group guide with emphasis on the interests of the students and the positive elements that they want to identify. This method is structured in 4 stages: 1) identifying the positive elements; 2) outlining the objectives to be achieved; 3) establishing the action plan to achieve the objectives; 4) establishing the implementation of the plan (Bîrnaz & Botezatu, 2020).

The SOAR analysis aims to focus on the success and positive elements instead of focusing on the problems. The analysis involves identifying the strengths (S), opportunities (O), aspirations (A) and results (R) of the actors involved in the educational process.

Appreciative communication and advising skills are necessary for teachers to streamline relationships with students. Appreciative advising starts from the following basic assumptions (Fadel et al., 2017):

- Each student has the potential for success;
- Each student has unique positive aspects;
- By analyzing the context, the past experiences, and the future goals, students can identify their strengths;
- Not all students can identify their positive aspects to harness them;
- The teacher plays an important role in developing the students' self-knowledge skills;
- The capabilities and attitudes of the teacher influence his / her relationship with the students.

Thus, researchers J. L. Bloom, B. L. Hutson and Y. He (2008) propose the model of appreciative advising adapted to the educational environment. According to appreciative education model, the appreciation is a multifaceted process and the consecutive stages determine the efficiency of the relationships between the educational actors:

1. *Disarm stage* involves creating a safe and welcoming environment, being important for building mutual trust between student and teacher;
2. *Discover stage* involves identifying the positive aspects and strengths of those involved in the appreciation process. The appreciation starts from the awareness of one's own abilities and qualities by the teacher as educational manager and educational actor. In this sense, at this stage are involved the self-reflection capacities and metacognition of teacher.
3. *Dream stage* consists in creating a vision for the future and guiding the students in setting new goals;
4. *Design stage* involves the elaboration of an action plan in order to achieve the present objectives;
5. *Deliver stage* consists in the implementation of the action plan;
6. *Do not settle stage* refers to the setting of new expectations, requirements, educational and/or personal objectives.

Appreciative advising requires from the teacher the manifestation of appreciative thinking, characterized by recognizing the potential of each student and emphasizing their strengths. In educational environments, the appreciative intelligence of the teacher is associated with the ability to communicate effectively with students and to see the positive aspects regardless of the situation; to guide them on the path of developing their own potential in terms of knowledge, capabilities and skills; to develop their optimistic and positive attitude in addressing the difficulties in the learning process (Bîrnaz & Botezatu, 2020).

Appreciative analytical skills represent the system of skills centered on the appreciation of the positive aspects of the students potential and their development in the context of the initial vocational training:

• Reframing capacity represents to seek a new framework or vision of the world, to be open to new concepts, ideas, perspectives and possibilities;

• Affirmative capacity represents to observe and communicate about what is good and constructive;

• Potential capacity means to see the potential in oneself and in others (students, teachers);

• Collaborative capacity means to get involved in group activities, to create a favorable cooperation environment for achievement tasks;

• Emergent capacity means to be flexible in the spontaneous and unpredictable occurrence of new changes.

4. Limits and Discussions

Existing research in educational and psychological field has not led to a certainty about the existence or inexistence of appreciative intelligence. The initial structure of appreciative intelligence proposed by Thatchenkery and Metzker (2006), where there are three components: the ability to notice the positive, reframing and noticing the evolution of the future, raises the issue of the unity of the appreciative intelligence construct from the point of view of the existence of an unique capacity, dynamic and multidimensional, or the meeting of three or more abilities that the individual can manifest separately in various situations of life. The question also arises whether the appreciative intelligence of the teaching staff can be developed and what the development methodology would be. Another argument of critique regarding appreciative intelligence can be related to the insufficient delimitation of emotional intelligence. Studies on appreciative intelligence should be complemented by quantitative analysis carried out on representative samples from various cultural environments to see to what extent we are talking about a general aptitude, or about a product of socialization in the postmodern stage. The question arises whether appreciation is really an innate ability and its development might be limited, which is why it is important that research on appreciative intelligence identifies the relationship between the innate attitude to appreciate and the social construction of appreciation.

5. Conclusions

At the current stage of development, the understanding and application of appreciative intelligence is closely related to the adherence to appreciative paradigm and to the appreciative methodology of education. There is a need to develop tools to measure this ability in the educational field.

The meta-analysis on psychology and pedagogy research, change management, positive psychology on appreciative intelligence, allowed to identify its specificity in the educational field. Thus, appreciative intelligence involves a system of three interconnected components: appreciative inquiry, appreciative advising and appreciative mindset.

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