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**NARRATIVE IDENTITY – A FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT IN THE**  
**DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF**

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*Abstract*

The paper "Narrative identity - a fundamental concept in the development of the self" focuses on the applicative dimension, on how to capitalize the relationship between self-esteem and narrative identity in the level of instructional-educational activities, but also to highlight the implication of factors (social - economics, family, school, gender, group of friends, etc.) that influence the development of the two concepts. The investigative approach realizes a radiography of the educational reality, which underlines the way in which the educable adopts the premises of stability or instability, overestimating or underestimating in the process of self-evaluation of his own characteristics. This study aims to provide information to the teachers through which in the educational approach they can use the relationship between the level of self-esteem and the narrative identity of the educables. The narrative identity under the influence of the determining factors is reconstructed with each social interaction in the daily life, allowing the educable with each interaction to develop his story of the self. In order to achieve the academic and social success, for the efficient functioning in the family, school or community environment, the student develops a linguistic and dialogical perspective, which allows the social structure of the self to be received from its linguistic-relational perspective. Thus, in the narrative, the teacher guides the metaphorical discourse of the educable by reconstructing its meaning and purpose in life.

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**Keywords:** Narrative identity, narrative approach, academic self-concept, self-esteem, educable.



## 1. Introduction

The new paradigm of poststructuralism redefines the complexity of the self concept, which is no longer just a single entity, a one-dimensional construct, becomes a complex construct, differentiable from other concepts, where the individual through active participation has the ability to redefine, influencing the multidimensional characteristics of the concept of self, throughout its existence, including its dynamics. In this context, the narrative paradigm is developed, which allows the individual under the influence of complex issues from the societal level to enrich their self-concept through an integrative approach, through the narrative metaphor, the story of the self.

Through the narrative approach of the self, it allows the story-teller, from the first years of existence to form and develop the general self concept, which is not yet differentiated, and the educable through active participation in his own training, he learns to hierarchize his own learning and training experiences and to develop realistic self-assessment skills and to build strategies for emotional and behavioral self-regulation. Thus, life becomes a narrative for the educable, in which he is a storyteller, consciously building his existential reality, and hierarchizing his needs and interests. In this context, he becomes a main or secondary actor in defining his own life, but also a documentarist and treasurer of his own characteristics of his existence (Adler et al., 2017; Adler, Waters, Poh, & Seitz, 2018; Gavrilovici, 2013, 2014, 2016; McAdams, 1988, 1993, 2006, 2015; McAdams & Pals, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McAdams et al., 2006; McLean, 2017).

## 2. Problem Statement

The motivation of the theme is centered on the applicative dimension, on identifying the modalities of the involvement of the teachers in the development of the construct of narrative identity, as an educational approach to explore the autobiography of the educable one, based on well-defined narrative and relational principles, but also on highlighting the possible solutions advanced by the teachers in the development of narrative identity construct, an integral part in the personal and social development of the educables. From this point of view, "teaching skills and communicative competence have a psychological training that leads to an efficient and effective behavior of the teacher" (Cuc, 2013, p. 226) in order to explore the problem that educables face, allowing them to value the learning and training experiences that the educable has gone through, his knowledge in diversified communication contexts. In this continuous process of redefinition of the educable, the teacher guides the process of exploration and rediscovery of the new meanings of the experiences developed, becoming a facilitative teacher, open to change and unifying the current experience of the educable with the one in transition, eliminating segregation at the level of this existential redefinition (Dulamă, Ilovan, Ciascai, & Maroși, 2015; Dulamă, Ilovan, & Magdaș 2017; Dulamă, Ilovan, Bagoly-Simó, & Magdaș 2019; Dulamă & Ilovan, 2016; Ilovan, Jordan, Havadi-Nagy, & Zametter, 2016; Ilovan et al., 2018; Chiș & Oltean, 2019; Chiș, Magdaș, Dulamă, & Moldován, 2019; Ursu, Dulamă, & Chiș, 2019).

### **3. Research Questions**

Considering the structuralist paradigm and the poststructuralist perspective, in a dynamic society in which the individual under the pressure of social and professional competitiveness and concerned with the increase of the quality of physical, mental, emotional and social life, it is most often necessary to carry out an "analysis of surface" (Gavrilovici, 2014, p. 370) on the behaviors and attitudes of the personal life, on the efficiency of the communication in the interpersonal relations established at social level in order to build the identity; so that the identity of the individual becomes the story of his life with complex intrigues in his permanent development, but also in the management of the lifestyle from the need to build a sense of his life. Therefore, having as a theoretical basis the perspectives on self and identity, we propose the research to be guided by the question:

To what extent is narrative identity, as a story of the self, is used in the personal and social development of students in the gymnasium?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

In a society that is increasingly dynamic, there are opportunities and high living standards, but in the same time there are areas with financial interest and economic and social crises, the individual struggles for a good living, for a high standard of living. In this context, it is subject to psychological, emotional and social costs, but regardless of whether we analyze their direct or indirect influence, the educable is at the same time under the influence of parental, educational, relational, social, cultural or occupational control, and in his experience of social learning and training, realizes that through its active participation in its own formation, by its implicit action, by the emotional complexity and the defense and adaptation mechanisms developed, by what it builds in its progressive formation, by the authenticity and the role of autonomy in its evolution, by perceiving its self-efficacy and developing self-esteem, the educable expresses and fully develops the dimension of his personality. The new generation of educables having access to the new digital technologies and the online environment from the first years of development, their efficient functioning in the educational and community environment is influenced by their increased capacity for self-knowledge and development of the mechanisms of emotional and behavioral self-regulation, which leads to the increase of the quality of individual and socio-professional life. In a society in which the Internet, the new technologies represent a social and technological capital, which ensures the development of global policies, the educational services offered by the educational institutions meet the needs and social interests, through which they develop at the educables communication and interpersonal skills competences in various communication media, which also target decision-making skills and negotiation strategies. The mechanisms of the present information society and of knowledge, generate among the educables new requirements and standards to which the educables must correspond by their abilities, by assuming principles, roles and responsibilities according to the social requirements, increasing the performances, but also building harmonious relationships through valuing personal qualities without harming others. In this context, the narrative identity of the educables is structured, as a result of the evolution process of the individual, in order to achieve "the meaning of a purpose and the unity of life" (Adler, 2012, 2013; as cited in Gavrilovici, 2014, p. 372), but also of personality development in an integrative way, representing

"developing pattern of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and integrative life stories complexly and differentially situated in culture" (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 212), becoming an internalized story of integrative and holistic development of the educable (McAdams, 1988, 1993, 2006, 2015; McAdams & Pals, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean, 2017). Thus, the study aims to highlight the methods and techniques used by teachers in constructing the meaning and identity of educables, based on the three pillars genetic identity, environment and education, the determining factors in the bio-psycho-socio-cultural development of educables. The concept of narrative identity, as a construct of postmodernity, implies for the educable its initiation in approaching the meaning of life as a narrative, as a story in the frame, where the storyteller is even the educable, is invested with the storytelling quality of his own existence. The educable by this narrative approach has this possibility to solve problems, conflicts, stressful situations, fears, to evaluate the quality of his life. By approaching one's own life, as a story, a narrative approach in which through the self-knowledge and efficient self-regulation skills of one's own person, through an efficient functioning in different life contexts, the "path of initiation" in self-knowledge has been through the process of structuring, but also of exploring in this "journey" of the characteristics that structure their own identity, the whole approach under the perspective of the interpretation and reinterpretation of one's life, becomes a story of the self, a narrative that gives meaning and purpose to life and develops mechanisms of emotional and behavioral self-regulation necessary for optimal functionality and quality assurance of individual and social life (Lemeni & Miclea, 2010; Băban, 2011; Cuc, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

## **5. Research Methods**

Following the new paradigms developed at the level of the sciences of education, social psychology, but also school psychology, the research supports the involvement of multiple factors that leave their mark in the development and evolution of the identity of the educable, implicitly of the narrative identity: family, school institution, community, cognitive and socio-emotional development, the social processes in which it is involved or its evolutionary contexts, but also the many connections built between the components of the systems and actions, supporting common objectives from a holistic and integrative perspective, because the educable in its development represents, "a nucleus of a system that is it is constantly changing" (Ceobanu, 2013, p. 189).

The purpose of the research was to establish the impact that the methods and techniques used in counseling the students in the gymnasium had in developing of the narrative identity.

### **5.1. Research objectives**

1. Studying the measure and the way of involving the teachers in the development of the narrative identity construct.
2. Highlighting the possible solutions advanced by the teachers in the development of the narrative identity construct, an integral part of the personal and social development of the educables.

The study of the narrative identity was constructed through the pedagogical diagnosis on the development of the concept of self and identity among the educables in the gymnasium, but also in relation to the following indicators: educational services, products and resources, which make the school-family-

community partnership, the new technologies of access, human resources (initial and continuous training, professional competences, specializations), teaching strategies more efficient.

The research objectives are supported by the formulation of the working hypothesis.

## **5.2. Research hypothesis**

A high self-esteem contributes to the development of the narrative identity of the students in the gymnasium.

In the research approach, the sample of subjects was made up of the simple random sampling technique of 72 subjects, teachers from pre-university education, who came from four institutions and the related structures, with a socio-cultural diversity of the school population. In the description of the sample of subjects the following were followed: initial and continuing education, psycho-pedagogical training programs; the didactic degree obtained, the seniority in the institution where it is a holder, the seniority in the education system and the seniority in specialty registered within the system.

In accordance with the research objectives, the method and the working tool were established, in order to ensure the sustainability of the substantive research, from this point of view an interactive research method was used, the focused and structured interview followed the obtaining from the sample of subjects of opinions and suggestions, of the problems they face in the educational environment. The research used the method of researching curricular documents and other school documents, but also the research tools and methods used in data collection, whose analysis verifies the hypothesis drawn.

## **6. Findings**

Based on the sincerity of the interviewed teachers, the flexibility and originality with which they approached the structured and focused group interview on the narrative identity of the students of the in gymnasium, the study data were delimited, the analysis and interpretation being followed, which had led to the relevant conclusions of the research. They emphasized that the research purpose was achieved, and by correlating the research objectives with the general hypothesis, it was found that the hypothesis was confirmed, ensuring coherence and validity of the study undertaken. The results of the research also determined the directions of development and action by designing intervention measures at the level of the educables in the gymnasium cycle, focused on self-knowledge and personal development, in general, but also on the development of narrative identity, in particular, in order to develop a raised self-esteem, which favors opportunities for the establishment of school success, implicitly also the valorization of its actions at social level. From the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the results of the interviewed teachers, it was identified that 94.44% of them want a rethink of the directions of action and development of the educational policies by coherence, cursiveness and flexibility, the effects of these unstable steps leave their mark on the design and the organization of the instructional-educational activities, with consequences at the didactic level, implicitly on the development of the educable ones. Also, the teachers highlighted the need to implement in the gymnasium cycle some modalities of integrated organization of the contents in order to train and develop at educables an integrative vision on the social reality, of the existential environment of the educable. A percentage of 80.55% of the interviewees pointed out that they follow in the educational approach the development of narrative identity construct, as a story of the self-directed by

the complex dimension and the relation of interconnection between the level of self-esteem and personal development, while a percentage of 78,75% of the teachers affirmed the need for the narrative identity concept to continue to be approached in the training courses, the way in which the educational staff can assume the exploration of this concept from the point of view of the three locations: “the temporality, the relational aspects and the spatial aspect” (Gavrilovici, 2014, p. 373), which would allow them to acquire more efficient working methods and techniques in the intervention at level of this construct in the counseling activities. Also, the teachers emphasized the need to carry out exchanges of professional experience at institutional level and of the professional community, the participation in the direct activities carried out by specialists that allow them to organize learning and training experiences through an active participation of the educables in which they have to develop strategies for self-regulation of one's own person, develop his or her motivational system, structure a positive self-image in the family environment, the school institution or the community environment; to develop communication and interpersonal skills, managing conflict and crisis situations; to draw in this course of the road of initiation in the social reality objectives and reasonable expectations depending on the age and skills developed. 87.5% of teachers consider that pre-adolescents who have a negative self-image reflected in poor relationships with other pre-adolescents or adults, in poor academic performance, but also a low self-esteem highlighted by a low frustration tolerance, the refusal to assume their own deeds and their consequences, the lack of involvement in the task and of assuming responsibilities at family, school or social level, in the method of the guided autobiography (guided autobiography) the metaphorical discourse of the story of the self is reduced to fears, conflictual problems, there is not in the narrative discourse a red thread of the meaning and purpose in the social life and of professional orientation, based on a positive attitude towards new and knowledge, on medium and long-term goals, on the experience of forming the past temporality, but also on the well-being of the present involved in the temporal axis of the future of the educable (Chiș & Oltean, 2019; Chiș et al., 2019; Ursu et al., 2019). Also, 91.66% of the respondents underline the aspect that in the narrative practice applied to pre-adolescents with low realistic self-assessment skills, after guiding the interventions based on narrative approaches, they build their life stories with omissions or major changes, because through this type of communication and through self-disclosure they are not prepared for personal disclosures or the educable-educator relationship is not yet matured and there is no feeling of acceptance and safety. This is the reason why this percentage, emphasizes the building of the relationship, the improvement of its well-being, following the outsourcing of the problem and the collaborative conversations with the educables in order to assume the responsibilities and the management of conflicts and problem situations. A percentage of 81.94% of the respondents stated that, the narrative approach on educables concerns two aspects: the procedural aspect and the motivational aspect, representing an argument in the development of learning and training experiences, a factor that triggers, stimulates and orientates at the reflective and self-reflective level the whole process of self-knowledge and personal development. In this context, 68% of the teachers pointed out that the narrative approach in the educational approaches has positive effects in the development of personal and social autonomy, as a specific technique in the construction of the narrative identity, which makes the pre-adolescent aware in assuming responsibility for their own actions, of mutual respect, increasing the level of tolerance and assertiveness in the actions of interpersonal communication and relationship based on involvement and commitment, reciprocity and social influence (Cuc, 2013, 2014).

The focused and structured interview aimed to find out the expectations of the teachers, the problems with which the sample of subjects faces in the educational environment regarding the development of self-competence, which at this age support the respondents is declining and has as a source devaluation. From this point of view, the respondents argue that the narrative method and the guided autobiography represented techniques by which they solved the perceived difference of educable between the ideal image of themselves and their academic performances; also these techniques are effective in improving the low self-esteem, due to socio-cultural discrimination or in setting reasonable expectations of the pre-adolescents according to their own characteristics and competences, but also in relation to the expectations of others. Also, a percentage of 93% of the respondents emphasized that the autobiographical story and the outsourcing of the problem faced by the educables is not just a technique by which the pre-adolescents gave meaning and purpose to the learning and training experiences, through which they built their reality, but these narratives represented a foundation in the improvement of personal and social autonomy, in identifying their own qualities, but the story of the self-allowed them to identify the roots that they have and to value them both individually and as a group. The narrative approach, emphasizes the respondents, allowed the teachers to intervene and to manage the low self-esteem of the educables, which originates in the inadequate emotional support provided by the family, group of friends, members of the community, influencing on pre-adolescents stability and conformity attitude and obedience.

## **7. Conclusion**

The diagnostic study obtained allowed the analysis of the way of involving the teachers in the development of narrative identity construct, as a multidisciplinary dimension and at the same time multidimensional, having an impact on the process of self-knowledge, construction and personal development for educables. Under the influence of socio-cognitive dynamics on the instructive-educational process and the activation of the educable, the narrative identity construct allows teachers to build dialogic interactions, which not only develop the story of the self, an internalized story of the educable, but also have an impact on the communication abilities in diversified contexts, develops strategies for managing the conflict, as well as the identified sources, develops the attitude of unconditional acceptance, a premise of the process of self-knowledge and personal development for the educables, making it responsible for the attitudes and actions taken, developing the respect for themselves and the others, through the responsible decisions taken. Also, the narrative metaphor with applications at both the individual level and the class of students, allows educables to outsource their life experiences through narratives, stories, thus becoming in accordance with the social-constructionist paradigm, an integral part of the reconstruction process of his reality, the educable in this complex process builds the reality of his life, while the educator is co-author of this process of regulating the life experience, he is co-author of the story of the self developed by the educable. Thus, teachers through narrative applications, which become the effective method in the educational approach, diagnoses the problem, which can label an educable, a group or a class and allows them by individual or group narrative approach to explore the problem, in all dimensions, of action and influence, re-contextualizing its descriptions, and through the dialogical practice, personal values, principles and rules are constructed and re-constructed, new dimensions of the educational and socio-

professional interests and needs of the educables (Adler et al., 2017; Adler et al., 2018; Gavrilovici, 2013, 2014, 2016).

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