

An Integrative Approach to Vocational Identity and of the Prevention of School Adaptation Difficulties

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Abstract: The present paper aims to present an integrative model of the development of vocational identity in the prevention of the school adaptation difficulties. The transition to another level of education, regardless of age, implies new obstacles and question marks. The essential dimensions of personal orientation in vocational development (psychological, pedagogical and social) are interconditioned and interrelated with each other. Research has indicated that student career exploration can have a positive effect on school engagement. Also, research has confirmed that students who are engaged in their education, consider school as a valuable experience, and want to participate in school activities are more likely to demonstrate high academic achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004; Want & Halcombe, 2010) and are less likely to drop out of school (Finn & Rock, 1997). Educational counseling / vocational education facilitates, through the steps it involves, the emergence of new cognitions, attitudes and effective behaviors. Also, the various practices promoted in school focus on the prevention of problems that may hinder the development and harmonious functioning of the person.

Keywords: *vocational identity, school engagement, prevention of school adaptation difficulties, adolescence.*

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1. Introduction

The need to have a purpose in our world is a reality for each of us, even more so for students, regardless of the environment of origin, age, concerns, socio-economic status. In these circumstances, accepting the important role of the school, it is noted that the individual can discover himself (he can seek his vocation), getting involved in the activities proposed to him, proving participation in the mental process of building meaning and significance in the career”, but connecting these dimensions with the social environment in order to avoid the difficulties of adapting to the school's requirements. “Moreover, this process encourages the individual to explore the limits of the present anchored in anxieties and insecurities, offering the possibility to identify meanings of personal career that allow openings that transcend the self and contribute to personal development and the well-being of others (Dumulescu, p. 6).

The real possibility of progress of the human being is examined today more and more from the perspective of psychology, especially from the psychology of education, whose message legitimating and vocational orientation converge to ensure the quality of (sub) systems in which the human being integrates at the earliest age to the most exposed to vulnerabilities (Neacsu, p. 17).

2. Literature review

Adolescence has been identified as a developmental life phase in which individuals explore the world of work to evaluate potential options in preparation for the later transition from school to work (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). During early adolescence, in particular, individuals engage in exploring educational opportunities, begin to develop a career identity, contemplate future careers, and make tentative career decisions (Betz, 2006; Flum & Blustein, 2000; Jantzer, Stalides, & Rottinghaus, 2009).

However, even if adolescence is marked by vocational choices, studies have been conducted that have shown that students can be involved in activities on vocational guidance even in primary school. Students begin to develop identities during their early adolescence, during which time they are influenced by early school experiences such as identification with workers, gender stereotypes, race, class, and social valuation (Gottfredson, 1981; Trice, Hughes, Odom, Woods, & McClellan, 1995) that can influence later career development.

Referring to the notion of vocational identity or, interchangeably, professional identity (Chavez, 2019), we mention that it follows from the works of Erikson (1950, 1968) on the stages of psychosocial development. In the theory of psychosocial development, Erikson suggests that choosing an occupation is essential for acquiring identity during adolescence.

Vocational identity also acts as a substantial source of meaning-making, well-being and mental health during adolescence (de Goede, Spruijitt, Iedema, & Meeus, 1999; Meeus, Deković, & Iedema, 1997).

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3. The essence of the adaptation difficulties perceived by adolescents

The period with maximum frequency of manifestation of maladaptive behaviors is puberty (10/11 - 14/15 years), a contradictory psychological stage, in which characteristics specific to childhood (childish attitudes) coexist with those characteristic of adolescence (increased abilities of abstraction and anticipation). Researchers L.R. Gherasim, S. Butnaru, citing the literature mentions the forms in which the difficulties of school adaptation can be expressed: decreased school performance, superficiality in approaching learning tasks, decreased motivation for knowledge and involvement in learning, absenteeism, school dropout, appearance behavioral problems or emotional adaptation to everyday challenges, substance abuse, affiliation with deviant groups. They can manifest themselves accidentally or continuously, singularly or in increasingly complex combinations, which can seriously and long-term endanger the person's school, professional and social evolution. [12, p. 13-14].

4. The relationship between vocational identity and the prevention of school adaptation difficulties

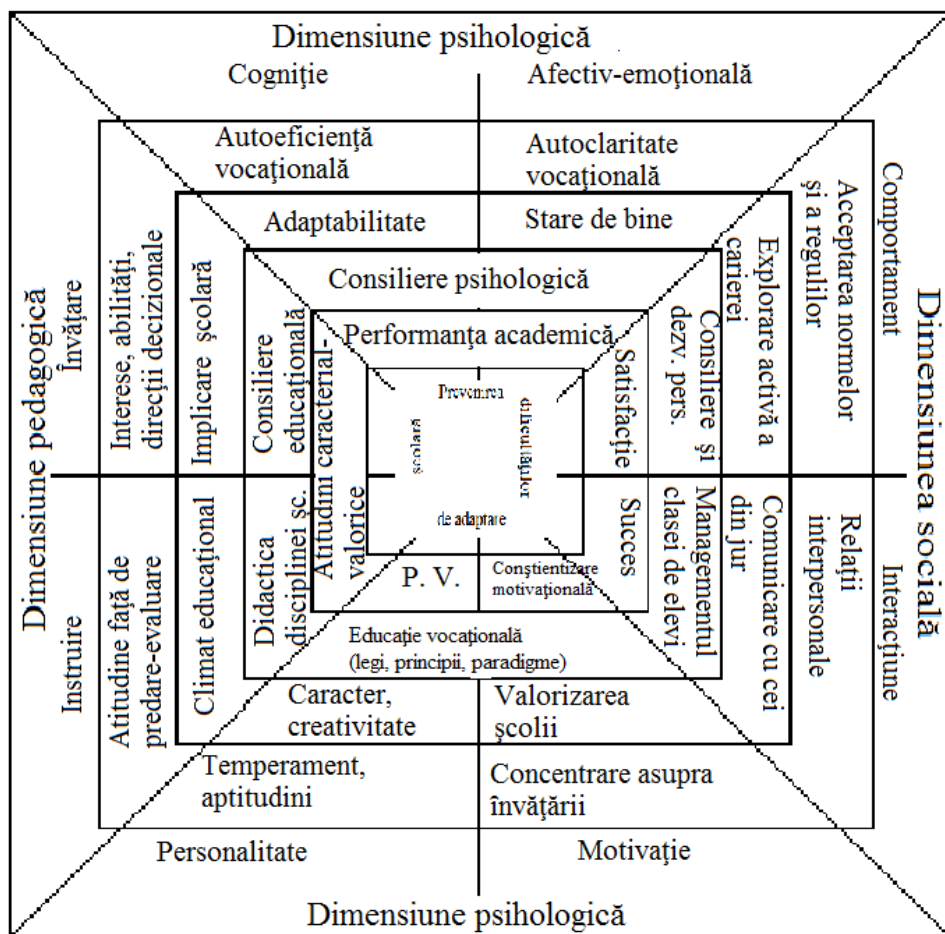
Elaboration of a model for the development of vocational identity and application of effective measures to prevent the difficulties of school adaptation in the pre-university environment, to the transition to high school education, based on an investigation of how adolescents are involved in future orientation and achievement of their goals is an alternative on the current context of education.

Investigating the factors, indicators and conditions that influence the prevention of difficulties in adapting to the transition to another level of schooling, we must note:

➤ the psychological dimension: personality attributes (temperament, skills, creativity), intrinsic motivation, cognitive constructs (vocational self-efficiency, adaptability), emotional constructs (vocational self-clarity, well-being);

➤ the pedagogical dimension: the training side (the attitude towards teaching-evaluation of students; the educational climate), the learning side (interests, abilities, decisional directions regarding the career orientation; school involvement);

➤ the social dimension: analysis of behavioral manifestations (acceptance of norms and rules, active career exploration) and interaction (interpersonal relationships, communication with others).



P.V.= vocational personality

Figure 1. The integrative model of the development of the vocational identity in the prevention of the school adaptation difficulties

In this context, the school engagement is presumed to be malleable (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Emotional school engagement refers to attitudes towards school and schooling. Elfers (2011) distinguishes two aspects of emotional school engagement: (1) sense of belonging—the extent to which students commit to being at school—and (2) valuing school outcome—the extent to which students value qualification. Skorikov and Vondracek (2012) report education to contribute significantly to vocational identity through the acquisition of work skills, students’ awareness of their career interests and their possibilities to guide their own career. The

influences of education on vocational identity are mainly promoted by integrating prospective working circumstances and conditions into the curriculum, for instance through Counseling and personal development.

6. Considerations on educational and vocational interventions

The current context is characterized by a focus on educational training, which should prepare the young generations to continue their studies, more than the preparation for the labor market (Dumulescu, 2019, p. 15). It is not exactly a misconception, because studies are also an essential component in the subsequent insertion on the labor market, but the orientation towards the future and the anticipation of new career tasks (career concerns) and the beliefs of self-efficacy in achieving career goals (confidence) actions that must be encouraged through educational and vocational interventions.

Many of the practices that have been shown to influence school outcomes also affect students' motivation and adaptation. For example, all the practices presented below stimulate a high motivation of students to learn and therefore their good school adaptation:

- teaching and learning practices, which focus on progress rather than on social comparison based on existing levels of competence;
- Practices that reflect the high expectations of the teacher towards the performance of all students in the class;
- Practices that ensure students' participation in all learning activities carried out in the classroom;
- Practices that involve the organization of activities for the practical application of assimilated knowledge;
- Practices that support student autonomy and decision-making;
- Practices compatible with students' culture and values at home;
- Practices that help students understand the importance and broader meaning of the information taught to them;
- Practices that lead to the creation of positive and supportive relationships between teachers and students;
- Practices that stimulate the creation of a positive and supportive climate for all students in the class.

Studies by Midgley, Maehr (1996) and their collaborators have shown that school reform efforts to reduce practices, such as person-centered social comparison systems or the use of competitive motivational strategies, have positive effects on adolescents' school motivation, on perseverance in completing difficult tasks learning and socio-emotional development (apud Adams, Berzonsky, 2009).

Scientific and empirical research lead us to the idea that the formation and development of the human personality is a complicated and complex process, which incorporates a set of educational, instructive activities; of psycho-pedagogical assistance and counseling, carried out throughout life (Raileanu, 2018, p. 34).

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