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## **Qualitative Methodology in Analyzing Educational Phenomena**

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# Qualitative Methodology in Analyzing Educational Phenomena<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*Semiological analysis of educational phenomena allow researchers access to a multidimensional universe of meanings that is represented by the school, not so much seen as an institution, but as a vector of social action through educational strategies. We consider education as a multidimensional phenomenon since its analysis allows the researcher to explore a variety of research hypotheses of different paradigmatic perspectives that converge in an educational finality. According to the author Simona Branc one of the most appropriate methods used in qualitative data analysis is Grounded Theory; this one assumes a systematic process of generating concepts and theories based on the data collected. Specialised literature defines Grounded Theory as an inductive approach that starts with general observations and during the analytical process creates conceptual categories that explain the theme explored. Research insist on the role of the sociologic theory of managing the research data and for providing ways of conceptualizing the descriptions and explanations. Qualitative content analysis is based on the constructivist paradigm (constructionist in the restricted sense that we*

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*used previously). It aims to create an "understanding of the latent meanings of the analyzed messages". Quantitative content analysis involves a process of encoding and statistical analysis of data extracted from the content of the paper in the form of extractions like: frequencies, contingency analysis, etc*

### **Keywords**

*Constructionist epistemologies; constructionism, postmodernism, education theory, qualitative methodology, Grounden Theory, content analysis, constructive dimension in education, collaborative creativity.*

## **1. Constructionist epistemology in the analysis of educational phenomena**

Semiological analysis of educational phenomena allow researchers access to a multidimensional universe of meanings that is represented by the school, not so much seen as an institution, but as a vector of social action through educational strategies. We consider education as a multidimensional phenomenon since its analysis allows the researcher to explore a variety of research hypotheses of different paradigmatic perspectives that converge in an educational finality.

Whether we consider the educational policies, the pedagogical methodology and its suitability to the specific of the social actor, that learns, and from here the engagement or disengagement of different social actors, pupils, parents, teachers, in learning process, both in terms of management of educational institution, the curricular pathways, or their social and professional development can all be included within the educational phenomena.

At the level of dominant paradigm in current epistemology, we identify a paradigm centered on the knowing subject, seen as a epistemological counterweight, to the idea of objectivity of the world, this point of view being under the influence of the development of quantum physics.

Simona Branc identifies two main paradigms based on qualitative research, namely objectivism and constructivism. The first assumes that information about the social world can be analyzed so as to reveal a reality or a social structure "beyond the data collected", while the second paradigm reveals how data and speeches are organized and created through social interaction (2008:86).

Complementar to postmodern deconstruction, the constructionism keep from this one the antirealistic nature, the centering on the plurality of experiences and interpretations in a plural world, or even a plurality of worlds, also the correlation of the meaning of words with the interpretive desire. Detach from this one through the centrality of the idea of social or cultural mediation of

the interpretations. There is not a single way to meet a unique truth, but a plurality of ways, mirrors of the whole in various levels of the fractal of existence. Constructionist epistemology refers to the emergence of scientific paradigms, social and cultural as a "negotiation" of the interpretations offered by data that derive from empirical reality or from other areas of knowledge such as theory, models, etc.. Any type of speech, including the education one, is interpreted as a "social reconstruction of reality" based on an interpretative consensus. Meanings of concepts, as they are taken from the scientific speech of educational discourse, are a paradigmatic model, relatively independent of the science from which it comes. Cultural derivation of the concepts meaning, from the constructionist perspective, is the basis of semantic convergence of any socio-cultural paradigms. In the mentalities plan takes place the deepest restructuring, moving from the understanding of an objective world, knowable and unique, to the model of a plurality of worlds, whose indeterminacy is theoretically predicted.

This new epistemology renounces the claim to causally explain the reality in favour of a better understanding of it, especially the adequacy of the consequences with the results of experiments. Epistemology has become a particular type of pragmatic discourse, ie a coherent system of rules of meaning, able to produce "a construct called truth." Besides epistemic discourse and the scientific one, new types of discourse, and educational discourse is no exception here, define intersubjective their own constructs on the word truth. We have in this way a theological truth, a politic truth etc. (Gergen, 2005). Convention of language proposed in the scientific discourse upon the truth is socially privileged in society. Other types of discursive conventions have had their own period of monopoly regarding "the construct of truth."

### **1.1. Constructionism and Postmodernism**

Constructionism is seen as part of the postmodern paradigm because of the relativization patterns and the reality report to the negotiation of interpretation. Constructionist epistemology is, through its close structure to postmodernism, of lyotardian vision according to that our picture of reality is a narrative, a consensus of speech - believes Hacking (1999:196). Educational discourse is a particular form of discourse and can be analyzed in constructionist manner as a textual analysis.

Constructionism can be used methodological, from the epistemic subject's importance in the social construction of truth.

The concept of truth has therefore the significance in relation with a socially fact or an experience, social accepted as such.

Social constructionism can be applied to a whole series of theories that have as a starting point Gergen's work, from which definitive articles / books

we can consider the following: The social constructionist movement in modern psychology (1985), Toward a generative theory (1987), Organizational science in a postmodern context (1996), An invitation to social construction (1999), Psychological science in a postmodern context (2001) etc.

Constructionism is concerned mainly with explaining the processes, by which people describe, explain and take note of their world and that includes them (Gergen: 2005). Campbell, Coldicott and Kinsella believe that constructionist view suggests a model through that reality is created within communication process and with language tools, every person influencing and shaping responses of others. Constructionist emphasis appears on the network of interactions between individuals in the communication process (1994:18). The significance and meaning of words are not given in according with a correspondence theory of truth, and especially of a theory of social negotiation of meaning and indirect replacement of truth with the concept of appropriateness and verisimilitude. Continuing the idea of Campbell, Van Nistel Roof (cf. Haar 2002) considers that we should eliminate the illusion of ontological rupture between subject and object and replaced by a construct intersubjective reality. Van der Haar, analysing Van Nistel Roof's work, considers that the fundamental concern of the constructionism as being the process of significance - creation of meanings - through what assume a meaning of the subjective experience of reality. Individuals are thus able to produce different realities - parallel (2002:16).

## **1.2. The constructionist model of education theory**

The constructionist model in general, and education one for our study, is seen in the manner proposed by Jean Francois Lyotard, as being a deconstruction of the "reality" concept to the social construction, of "narrative", discursive practice of consensus generating.

Paul Gross and Norman Levitt (Gross and Levitt, 1988) asserts that science, and we add here education as a new form of access to knowledge, is a set extremely elaborate within a particular culture and particular historical circumstances, of a body of measurable knowledge concerning the real world. It is a speech addressed to a specialised interpretive community, created within a complex network of social circumstances, political opinions, economic priorities and ideological climate, all together representing the inescapable environment of both the scientists / researchers and to those involved in education. Gergen moves the interpretative focus from the reality to reality context and to social network that generates the interpretative agreement.

Education, as being through its essence an integrative process, is prone to transdisciplinarity, and that's why we chose this dimension of social practice to illustrate the interpretative cleavage of a series of social techniques generated

by the changes of paradigms offered by passing to a transmodern epistemology centred on interconnection.

## **2. Qualitative methodologies - conceptual clarifications**

### **2.1. Qualitative Methodology. Definition**

Any scientific approach contains a number of methodological steps from the building of assumptions and research questions, explanation and operationalization of theoretical frameworks, and their coordination with the research hypotheses, determination of methods, techniques and tools used. In conducting of any qualitative research we start with the analysis of a series of reference theories in social practice.

Norman and Yvona define qualitative research as a process of concentration of several methods, which involve an interpretative and naturalistic approach to the subject studied (cf. Chelcea, 2007:72).

Petre Ilut (1997) considers that are three main meanings in which is used the qualitative analysis in research:

- 1) the multi-, inter-or even transparadigmatic;
- 2) the major paradigm, which includes some particular paradigms, but not the positivist one;
- 3) the specific methodological strategy (methods and practices of empirical research) and the completion and presentation of results, which may be a paradigmatic type.

The author believes the qualitative research as being a field of investigation on its own. He transcends disciplines, areas and thematic issue; a complex and also an interconnected family of terms, concepts and assumptions that surrounds the term "qualitative research". These include the traditions associated with the postpositivism, poststructuralism and many qualitative research perspectives or methods connected to cultural and interpretative studies. Agabrian (2004) notes that the data accuracy in qualitative research refers to the amount and richness of information collected from each and not the number of subjects investigated.

### **2.2. Methodological Mixing and Theoretical Hybridization**

Stefan Cojocaru defines the process of hybridization of theories as a form of discovery, construction and argumentation of new theories, from the elements of different paradigms (Cojocaru, 2010a:148). Mixing methods is seen by Stefan Cojocaru as the utilization of combined methods in social research, which aims to describe as accurate and fair the complexity of social reality. Methodological mix has the advantage of reducing inherent errors in applying any type of methodology, and on the other hand to generate deeper and broader

meanings (2010a:144). Methodological mixing is therefore a clarifying process and depth generating in the evaluation process of social reality, while the theoretical hybridization generates social innovation through its transparadigmatic character.

### 2.3 Data Validation

To ensure the validity of the data it is utilised the triangulation of methods, space and data sources. Stefan Cojocaru, from Caracelli and Greene, considers the triangulation as a strategy for assessing the same phenomenon through different methods, thus ensuring the convergence and validity of research, and creating the methodological mix assumptions. The specialised literature presents four types of triangulation (Cojocaru, 2010a:164), as following:

- Triangulation of data that can come from various sources of information;
- Triangulation of investigators involving multiple evaluators to provide the opportunity to diversify the vision of evaluation;
- triangulation of theoretical perspectives, namely using several models of interpretation of issues pursued;
- Methodological triangulation, which refers to the use of different procedures for collecting and analyzing data (Cojocaru, 2010a:164).

Another form of triangulation identified by Simona Branc (2008) is the triangulation of time.

### 3. Grounded Theory

According to the author Simona Branc one of the most appropriate methods of qualitative data analysis is Grounded Theory, this one being viewed as a process of systematic generating of concepts and theories based on the data collected. Specialised literature defines Grounded Theory as an inductive approach that starts with general observations and during the analytical process creates conceptual categories that explain the theme explored. The research insists on the role of sociological theory in managing the data research and provides ways of conceptualizing the descriptions and explanations (Goulding, 1999; Branc, 2008).

Strauss and Corbin (1998:5) refer to constructions that are generated during the Grounded Theory process as changeable, open and negotiable. Grounded Theory itself is a research strategy which aims to generate new theories or models based on actual data. Grounded Theory involves a systematic effort to generate various concepts and theories based on data collected (Adam,

2009). It is an inductive approach (Sandu, Ponea, 2010) that starts from the data collected from subjects, by techniques which allow qualitative interpretation: interviews, focus groups, etc. During the inductive process are created conceptual categories of a generality level higher and higher, which explains the theme explored. This approach is the opposite of deductive logic, which is based on the assumptions set out a priori (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Adam, 2009). In the research based on Grounded Theory, the theory evolves during the research process itself and is a product of continuous interaction between data collection and analysis. Therefore, unlike many other methods, theorists do not wait until all data are collected before the analysis begins, but rather seek for meanings through early data query (Goulding, 1999). The research evolves over the course of data obtaining and also intercalation / confronting them with existing information in the literature.

Starting from Marvasti's works (2004), the researcher Simona Adam identifies the following stages of a research based on Grounded Theory:

- Simultaneous data collection and analysis;
- Highlighting the early themes emerging from data analysis;
- Discovery of the main social processes revealed by the data collected;
- Inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and summarize these processes;
- Sampling process for improving the categories through a comparison process;
- Integration of categories from a theoretical framework that specifies the causes, conditions and consequences of the studied processes.

### **3.1. Constructive Grounded Theory**

Knowing the world is essentially a human creation, not a mirror of an independent reality. Main premises of the constructionism as proposed by Van der Haar (2002: 22), from the contributions of Burr, Gergen and Bouwen are:

- Social constructionism assumes that the world can not be known as it is, but rather as a multiple series of socially constructed realities;
- Social constructionism sees the language, communication and the discourse as having the main role in the interactive process through which we can understand the world and ourselves;
- Social constructionism sees language and communication as a process of coordination of actors;
- Social constructionism is concerned with relational process through which social actors construct social realities;

- Social constructionism involves an exclusive distinction between subject and object; it is not a happy construction or necessary and therefore it is proposed to overcome the restrictive dualism that sees the two as existing as independently of each other;
- Social constructionism adepts consider as important the reflection upon the social, cultural and historical fund of our assumptions and constructs, and the maintaining of the openness to other possible realities constructed.

Simona Adam, starting from Charmaz works (2006), considers the Constructive Grounded Theory as a methodological approach that focuses on how data are produced and the analysis of symbolic interactionism. In a constructivist approach it starts upon social interaction and how it creates meaning. The data analyzed did not reflect only temporal, spatial or cultural context, but also the views of the researcher (Plugaru, Ponea, 2010). Constructivist approach assumes that there are multiple realities and that the data collected reflect a mutual construction that was born from the interaction between researcher and the researched topic.

### **3.2. Construction of categories in Grounded Theory**

Constructivist Grounded Theory, according to Simona Adam, starts from data coding using sensitive concepts - analytical tools that can be revised to be consistent with the nuances of the researched subject. Data coding follows two phases: the initial coding and selective coding / focused coding (Lincoln, Denzin, 2000). Initial coding of data research aims to discover significant themes or categories. This is followed by focused coding, which assumes a nearest data categorization to theory.

Sharan consider the categories as conceptual elements that covers many individual examples or data units; the great challenge of qualitative analysis is to find exactly those regularities and patterns derived from the data obtained through Grounded Theory research (Sandu, Ponea, Vlasa, 2010) . The source of the categories should be clear within the research, as derived from data and in the same time be above them, as a generality level, and could then refer to other similar data (2010). For example, in an analysis aimed to highlight the skills required to be submitted in the education of professionals, such as those necessary within a baker, the regularities observed, ie the need for production quality control may be transferred, hypothetically, other professions that are made occupational analysis, including that of educator.

The encoding process starts with reading data from the transcript of the interview, focus group, brainstorming etc. accompanied by notes on the transcript, such as notations, comments and observations. This process of

noting what appears to be potentially relevant to research, and which can answer questions is called encoding.

At the beginning of an analysis the researchers must be open, considering that anything is possible at this time, and this first coding is called open coding. A second step in the process of encoding is axial coding of data as is proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2007). The analytical coding is a reflection on the meaning of the words of the speakers. During this level is established a reference range of items to be compared with those in the transcription analysis (open coding). The lists resulting from this process should be consolidated into a single list which is the primary classification system and analysis of regularities and patterns

### 3.3 Content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is based on the constructivist paradigm (constructionist in the sense we use previously used it). It aims to create an "understanding of the latent meanings of the messages analyzed. Quantitative content analysis involves a process of encoding and statistical analysis of data extracted from the content of the paper in the form of extraction frequencies, contingency analysis, etc. (Adam, 2009).

We prefer to use a coding process in successive stages, starting from the selection of communication structures (in vivo) taken directly from transcripts of communication units of the subjects. Against them we will move on inductive processes, to extract significances assigned by the subjects' answers, and then assigning these ones to a significant category. For example, we proceeded to extract keywords, then the mix of statements of the subject (subjects) in the primary categories that we will meet later in secondary categories. The process must be completed in a finite number of steps by identifying categories of maximum generalization.

We present an example taken from a survey conducted jointly by the authors of this article together with Stefan Cojocaru, regarding general and specific skills necessary to apply the attributions of a supervisor. Please note that the occupational analysis process is an essential element in the design of curriculums, for both vocational and technical education, and higher education. The qualitative analysis of the focus group consisted in selecting and interpreting the most significant semantic constructions presented by the participants during this technique. There were chosen the most relevant expressions for the purposes and objectives of the research, after which were derived the frameworks categories through a series of successive inductive step. In the first place we chose a set of keywords derived from subjects' expressions. In the second step we identified the major categories we consider that the subjects' answers fit. Inductive activity was achieved by three successive steps:

the first was the selection of the in vivo structures, the researchers agreed that as being significant, then the extracting of the keywords from what the participants from the focus group, and after that the second successive induction, the extraction of globalizing categories.

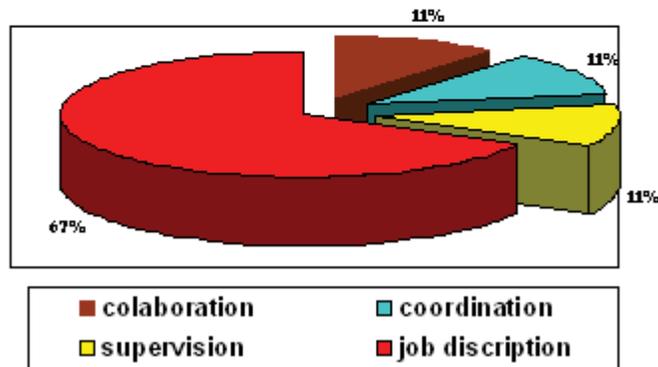
General categories (Induction no. 2)	Primary categories (Induction no. 1)	Keywords	The form as it appears (in vivo)	Frequency
Supervision Process	Colaborating with different specialists	Colaboration	“we work with many different centers have various programs where works a lot of professionals”	1 Total 1
Supervision Process	The work of the Coordinator	Coordination	“I am an executive coordinator and I coordinate both the work of the medical assistants and of the social works”	1 Total 1
Frameworks of the supervision	The supervision practice	Supervision	“I do not know if I cool this supervision work, but informal it is still supervision work; even there are not any standards in our country we still supervise their work”	1 Total 1
Frameworks of the supervision	The existent content of the social worker’s job description	Social worker’s job discription	“it is very well delimited”; “there are local atributions that they accomplish according the beneficiars”; “more formal then informal”; “there are work tools”; “it is completed by	1 1 1 1 1

			the executive coordinator with we evaluate their work”; “Contingency plans, job monitoring, statistics that are realized annual and monthly”	1  Total: 6
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Table: Analysis of job descriptions of the social workers with supervision responsibilities

We realized an analysis of the relative frequency of the keywords in order to highlight the perceived importance of the supervisors' attributions, as resulting from job descriptions of the persons with supervisory responsibilities.

**The importance of the job discription elements**



Interpretation is followed by an analysis of the categories' significance, and of the decoded meanings from the subjects' replies. In this case the interpretation is achieved through a "grid axial" represented by the categories of professional skills necessary to prepare a successful supervisor. The social worker's job description is seen by the respondents as being significant for the size of their practice along with collaboration, coordination and supervision, dimensions that should be reflected in this job description, as the subjects investigated considers. Respondents aware of a number of atributions specific to social workers, including coordination, control, evaluation, information on new tools, advice in setting up the instruments. All these are specific elements of

supervision, that the subjects identify in their job description, taking us to the conclusion that at least partially, they develop supervision work, which would be bounded by strict social worker activity.

*A.: As I said we work with many different centers have different programs were work various professionals: social workers, psychologists, physiotherapists, nurses, caregivers at home. The Home Care Program have 12 social workers, I am the Executive Coordinator and I coordinate the work of both nurses and social workers work, do not know if we can call supervisory work, but it is still non-formal, even if there are not any standards in our country but we still supervise their work. What can I say? There are so many...*

*D.: It starts with job description and then the legal framework.*

*A.: The social worker's job description is well defined; they are local responsibilities that they have to do and fulfill them according to the local beneficiaries, and I regularly check their work if is fulfilled, more in a non-formal way than in a formal one, there are also work instruments which are completed by the Executive Coordinator with which we evaluate their work virtually every day, through contingency plans, job monitoring, and statistics that are made annually and monthly.*

It resulted a particularly importance that is given to specific components derived from job descriptions, and specific skills as collaboration, coordination and supervision. By default, it appears that the supervision activity is not seen separately from the rest of their professional activities, but integrated in.

In a similar manner it was done in a research conducted by Simona Ponea and Chicos Catalina with respect to truancy of Roma children in the paper "The Roma between positive and negative". The research has considered the reasons for school absenteeism and drop out of Roma children in the researched village, linked to socio-familial situation of Roma children.

Here we will partially present a part of the table in which were outlined the primary inductive analysis, in order to highlight the methodological approach, rather than research results, results that are subject to other presentation and publication.

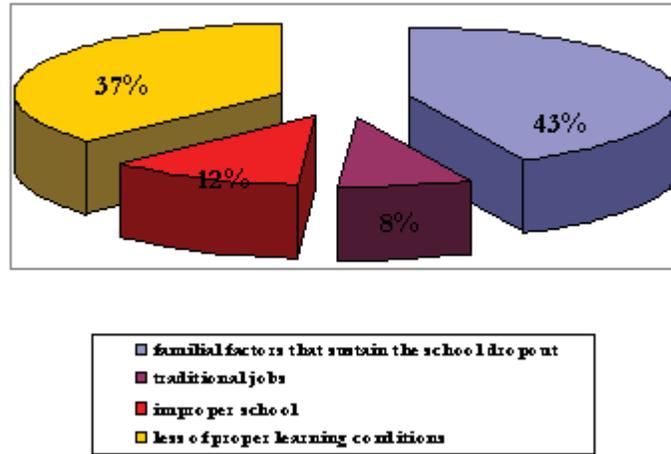
Categories	Keywords	Frequen cy	Specific expressions utilized by the interview's participants
Improper School	School in ruins	10	Do you see.... this is the situation... Mr teacher, the poor, beaten some beams .... dust falled in the childrens' head . School is going to ruin ... goes ...
	School with accident risk	11	Can you see how the situation is. The school is demolished, there is nothing miss, nothing. In

	Small school	8	winter is very difficult for children to come to school.  We are not pleased by the school because is very small. It's bitter, is not maintained.
Less of proper learning conditions	Less of cloths and shoes	8	We do not have any shoes, we do not have with what to send children to school every day. It is hard and the school is on the hill .... this is very difficult .... if anything, an opportunity to be a new school, a better room, we agree, otherwise it is not good ..... it is good here as well because we learned here as well, but you see the situation is...
	Broken banks	5	They are set like 3-4 pupils in a bank
	Less of space	6	We do not have enough classrooms
	Less of classrooms	6	There a few classrooms, but the one my son is learning it is very small
	Less of books (numar of titles)	10	We wish we had a proper library
Less of books (number of exemples)	8	When thy want books they have to write on a bet of paper the name of the book, then give to the librarian, and if there any exemplars left he can borogh that book, if not...  Also they could write on a bit of paper their name the one bit is lucky he can have the book to read it, but only for a few days It was the idée of the librarian	

	Less of computers	4	There are not enough computers. It is like when you talk about physics or a space navy but you do not know how it looks like
	Less of teaching material	8	There are not enough teaching materials, they do not have a workshop, no tools...they learn a lot of theories but there is no practice
	Less of furniture	6	The furniture is minimal – only 8 banks and a table, and the teaching material is created exclusively by our teacher from his pocket
	Less of supplies	6	The teacher says they do not have enough pencils, notebooks...but if there are no money what can we do? They do not have books as well because they did not received from school
	Less of financial resources	10	Compass not ... tubes, substances not...We did not do any experiments because of this One of them graduated 8th grade, but money is still enormously high for continuing the studies I would like him go to school, but if we not have food, clothes ... .. because he has to go like any child

Synthesis of the responses of parents (of Roma origin) whose children exhibit the phenomenon of school dropout it will be presented as a diagram that summarizes the causes in frequencies, and hence the importance of research subjects allocated to various causes.

### The research categories



Data interpretation started from a classical view type, centered on a realistic epistemology, namely the assumption that one can identify a number of general cases and exterior of the social system that generates absenteeism.

According to the diagram made we note that a important emphasis during the focus group has been placed on family factors generators of school dropout among Roma children and the lack of proper conditions for learning.

The research concerning the material resources of the school study highlighted a number of issues concerning: school infrastructure building is in an advanced state of decay, constructed of unsuitable material, lacking the necessary utilities (water, sewer, etc. modern heating sources. ). Besides these problems, there are as well serious deficiencies in the provision concerning to the teaching materials, lack of modern training, the book library, inadequate laboratory equipment, old school furniture etc.

During the focus group also there have been highlighted elements about participation to collateral courses involved, especially because of the need perceived by parents to be helped by the children at work.

The constructionist approach focuses on specific elements of intersubjective relations existing in the community, and that generates the school dropout directly to the community. We mention here the adherence to traditions, the need felt by parents to be helped into work, coupled with the idea that at least for the Roma children from rural, where the reasearch took place, that the school does not generate opportunities in life, that although this were not concrete expressed during the focus group and arising from the interpretation of the subjects.

## 4. Data collection techniques used in Grounded Theory

### 4.1 Focus group

The focus group type interview is a group interview, focused on a particular topic, strictly defined, which is led by a moderator and is part of qualitative data collection techniques to analyze the perceptions, motivations, feelings, needs and views of people.<sup>7</sup>

Simona Branc (2008) identifies three categories of limitations of the focus group, as following:

- First category derives from the qualitative nature of the investigation and is linked to poor statistical relevance;
- The second category of limitations arises from the moderation of these interviews that is extremely complex, and the results depend to a greater extent of the moderator's activity than in regular interviews;
- The third category of limits, also the most important one, refers to various group phenomena like polarization effects (exaggeration of opinions and of the attitudes expressed, as an effect of the group's pressure), the effect of herd, conformity to group norms, group contagion, etc.

The Focus group is a special form of interview, based on a specific topic, strictly defined, which is led by a moderator and is part of qualitative data collection techniques to analyze the perceptions, motivations, feelings, needs and views of people (Cojocaru, 2005b). Stefan Cojocaru presents the focus group as "a planned panel discussion organized to obtain perceptions about a range of narrower interest, conducted in a permissive environment, the discussion is relaxed and often enjoyable for participants to share their ideas and perceptions; group members influence each other, responding to ideas and comments" (Kreuger, apud. Marlow, 1993: 55-56).

Richard Krueger and Mary Casey define focus group as a type of special group in terms of scope, size, composition and processes used. This is a way to better understand how people feel or what they think to a certain problem, to a product or a service (Krueger, Casey, 2005:21).

We agree with Maria Socoro and Cristina Fernando (2010) considers that the focus group members have to be involved in all phases of the process, they were considered co-researchers in the development process of new development proposals.

Dana Cojocaru believes that the focus group interview is different from the individual interview that it "focus group pulls out a multiplicity of perspectives and emotional processes in a group context" (D. Cojocaru, 2003:89) that produce data because of the interactive discussions between participants, but that does not encourage interactive discussions between

participants. Through focus group there are obtained qualitative data that surprise the behavior of individuals, and perceptions rather than quantitative information (Cojocaru, 2005b).

Adrian Hatos (2009) starting from Stefan Cojocaru believes that the focus group is a technique you can use in research / evaluation of a situation, problems in terms of interpretations that people give them their feelings towards a certain event, phenomenon, opinions to a program, product, services, ideas, etc. Basically, it can be applied in all spheres of social life when it seeks information directly from individuals. The focus group technique is a qualitative type but does not exclude quantitative techniques type.

#### **4.1.1. Organizing a focus group**

The focus group involve between 6 and 10 people depending on the criteria covered by the research theme and the implication of the moderator (Cojocaru, 2005b). Stages of a focus group are:

- - established the theme of discussion;
- - determine the structure of the group and the selection ways of the participants;
- - elaborating and testing of the interview guide;
- - setting the date and place and preparation of the meeting;
- - preparation of the moderator and the assistant's moderator;
- - conduct focus group (Cojocaru, D., 2003; Cojocaru, 2005b; Hatos, 2009).

#### **4.1.2. Appreciative focus group**

Appreciative focus group represents the mixinf between clasic focus group and the nondirectiv appreciative interview. This method is based on Appreciative Inquiry. The technique aims for organizational, individual and community development etc.; through exploring the elements of successful from past experiences of subjects. Appreciative interview has an intentional non-directive form with a focus on the positive elements of the discourse of the subject (Sandu, 2009b; Cojocaru D., Cojocaru, Bunea, 2009).

Literature presents the use of focus group in a general framework of an appreciative research, as an appreciative interview, as a important component of the appreciative paradigm or as part of the programs / organizations evaluation process, applying the entire appreciative methodology as a group interview form (Preskill and Catsambas, 2006:88).

In our research it has been taken into consideration both the clasical focus group and appreciative focus group, in respect of obtaining necessary data

to conduct the appreciative research and experimenting a new framework for the focus group, which we call appreciative focus groups, and that respects the elements of the 4 D model, as described by Cooperrider in Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2006, Cooperrider, Sorensen, Whitney, Yaeger, 2005).

The appreciative focus group differs from the classical model of this method, on the one hand, by creating a focus group guide with emphasis on the positive elements that wish to be identified after the implementation process, and on the other side, of the 4D model, specific to Appreciative Inquiry, on the entire course of focus group. Thus this method is divided into four phases where: in the Discovery phase there are identified those elements that are positive, those "success stories" that define the theme explored; in the Dream phase there are shaped the dreams and desires which are related to the theme explored; in the Design phase there are designed structures that can support future vision; in the last phase, the Delivery one, are set the actions and the implementation way of the plan that aims to develop the new vision set out in the third stage.

A similar pattern to appreciative focus group, called Community Coffee, has been applied in London by Well London Community Engagement & Mapping Teams at the The Institute for Health & Human Development, University of East London.

#### **4.2. The Interview**

The interviewers highlighted one of the most characteristic human activity like communication, conversation, verbal transmission of information between people.

"It is a process of scientific investigation, that use the verbal communication process in gathering information in connection with the goal" (Pinto, Grawitz, 1964:591 in Miftode, 2003:244). "Playing a supporting role in the sociological investigation, the interview technique is intended to provide us with additional and complementary data on the topic, data that supports or call in question the conclusions based on direct observation or documentation (Miftode, 2003:244).

During the interview there are utilized generally open questions as to allow the interviewee a wider expression of his views, an accurate description of the problems they face, as they perceive it (Sandu, 2002:78). The interview is not a simple discussion between "two persons", but also a technique of scientific investigation, that is applied by more or less numerous teams, for scientific and interdisciplinary knowledge of a particular social phenomenon, in which case the "two discussion" (type somewhat journalistic) are "integrated" in a set of means of data collection, as a stage or "moment" of a sociological approach. The

sociological interview is thus "a process of scientific investigation that uses verbal communication process to gather information on purpose."

### **5. Constructive dimensions in education. Collaborative Creativity**

The appreciative pedagogy model has two fundamental dimensions:

- the social-constructionist dimension of education;
- the education focused on success and appreciation.

Social constructionist pedagogy argues that the learning activity is essentially an ongoing and active process of "construction's" skills (Fernando, 2010), from social interaction in peer groups, or a sustained interaction with the social environment. Bandura believes that imitative learning is achieved if the subject appropriates enough new behavior patterns that will occur later independently in his conduct (Bandura et al, 1961:571-572).

Learning is effective when the knowledge and skills acquired by students are systematically used in social situations than those they were taught. The student's mind should not be treated like a database that stores information read or exposed to a course. The educational partnership between the educator and the educated reestablishes the social construct called learning, a dimension of self, which catalyzes the student's cognitive and motivational abilities toward maximum self-actualization of their full potential, both for the educated and the trainer.

Education focused on success and appreciation aims the following elements, as proposed by O'Connur Yballe (2000:447-483):

- Focusing on the personal experience of the educated and the trainer, especially the positive elements of their experience;
- Focusing on the successes and winning strategies;
- Educational partnership relation.

The teacher's role changes from that of an transmitter of information, to own designer of his curriculum of the consumer of educational services.

Federico Varona Madrid enunciate the following features of the partnership between the education provider (teacher) and the education consumer (pupil, student, etc.):

- Confidence in the students' ability to be self-developing by knowledge and encouraging them to use their full creative potential.

The constructionist methodology generates an educational plan according to which the education is a constructive and collaborative process of creating a reality in the process of communication, and with language tools every individual influence and shapes the others responses (Sandu, Cojocar, Ponea, 2010).

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