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Ferrero, Andrea
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Social Responsibility in Vocational Guidance in Argentina

Responsabilidad social en la orientación vocacional en Argentina

Andrea Ferrero

Universidad Nacional de San Luis, Argentina

ABSTRACT

The beginning of the vocational guidance in Argentina was based on detecting personal characteristics regarding working abilities, and many social aspects were considered in the assessment process. In this country, increasing social exclusion as a product of poverty, lack of opportunities, unemployment and poor level of education, have introduced new aspects in vocational guidance considerations related to this new set of high level structural complexity. The professional responsibility in providing vocational guidance in such context is analyzed considering two kinds of sources: ethical standards of psychology, and specific competencies of vocational guidance.

Key words: Vocational guidance, social exclusion, competencies, professional ethics.

RESUMEN

Los inicios de la orientación vocacional en Argentina se asentaron en la detección de características personales relacionadas con habilidades laborales, y gran cantidad de factores sociales eran tomados en consideración en dicho proceso de evaluación. En este país, la creciente exclusión social como producto de la pobreza, la falta de oportunidades, el desempleo y el bajo nivel de educación, ha introducido nuevos aspectos en la consideración de la orientación vocacional, relacionados con este nuevo panorama de elevada complejidad estructural. La responsabilidad profesional al proveer servicios de orientación vocacional en este contexto es analizada a partir de la consideración de dos tipos de fuentes: los estándares éticos de la psicología y las competencias específicas de la orientación vocacional.

Palabras clave: Orientación vocacional, exclusión social, competencias, ética profesional.

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Dirección correspondencia/Mail Address: Andrea Ferrero, Universidad Nacional de San Luis, Mitre 1326, (5700) San Luis, Argentina (5700) San Luis, Argentina. e-mail: aferrero@unsl.edu.ar

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INTRODUCTION

Even as far back as 1949, vocational guidance was an unavoidable component of government policies in Argentina. This is shown by its inclusion within the constitutional reform of that year. This reform refers to vocational guidance as a complement of the action to instruct and educate thus being a social function that the State should protect and encourage through institutions in order to guide young people towards activities for which they have natural aptitudes and abilities, enabling them to make a suitable choice of occupation or profession that would render benefits to society and themselves (República Argentina, 1950). Two fundamental factors had contributed to the rise of vocational guidance: one was the knowledge generated by Psychology about the link between the necessary personal traits and a good working performance; the other one was the need for new intervention tools required by the social and economic changes after the 1930s crisis, which set the conditions for the formation of future fields for application (Klappenbach, 2005).

Half way through the XX Century, some authors made a distinction between individual and collective vocational guidance. The first aimed to achieve the dedication of an individual to a job suitable for him or her, obtaining maximum performance with less effort; the second aimed at an adequate distribution of the working population according to the interests and needs of the country on the basis of a determined economic and social plan (Mira & López, 1948). Years later, Resolution 2447/85, passed by the Ministry of Education and Justice on 20th September 1985 in Buenos Aires, established the possibility of carrying out vocational guidance, and education and employment, within the scope of psychology (República Argentina, 1985). In fact psychologists are still traditional vocational guidance providers in Argentina.

Over the years, vocational guidance has enriched its epistemological and applied core, developing a perspective based on vocational and occupational guidance, which considers the abilities and interests of the individual as well as the possibility of his or her insertion in the working market from a wider perspective. The concept of "occupational and vocational orientation" has been widely developed in Argentina. This is because of particular circumstances. On the one hand, the word "occupational" exceeds professional fields and includes other options of work insertion in society, and on the other, the word "vocational" is related to considering vocation as a construction and a product of uncountable factors, including those that are unconscious. Nowadays, the process of vocational counseling in Argentina, mostly considered as a psychologist's competence, means an interpersonal exchange between the counselor and the client that promotes the collaboration in a wide range of problems referring particularly to the choice of career, admission, adaptation and the proximity to the occupation within a

community. Some authors believe that vocational guidance, apart from its obvious application, is a highly useful tool for the client to elaborate some typical problems attached to choosing a job or career and, in this sense, it is considered as ancient rites of initiation which marked the passing point of individuals from one stage to another within a society (Picolli & Penna, 2001).

It is possible to realize how, from its beginning, vocational guidance in this country has been linked to the social context, acquiring along its history a diversity of epistemological, praxiological and even legal significance, whilst being a social function of the State.

EDUCATION POLICY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

In Argentina there is clear social inequality, with a high level of poverty and pauperism and a high unemployment rate. In 2002, the rate of unemployment was 17.8%; 57% of people and 47.7% of homes were below the poverty line; 27.5% of people and 19% of homes were below the pauperism line and the income per person was \$434 (approximately US\$ 145) (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2002). Numbers related to education were not encouraging, either, up to that time, 4.1 % of adults had never attended school; 35.1 % had completed only primary education; 12.9 % had finished secondary school and 7.7 % had completed university studies (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2002). Despite some indication of a slow improvement in these circumstances, Argentina is still suffering from severe structural conditions of social exclusion (Ferrero, 2003a).

Facing this type of reality, there is an increasing number of authors who have outlined the need to redefine the application of vocational guidance taking into account the socio-economic situation prevailing in a society and emphasizing the influence that the factors within the social context have on those people needing guidance. And it is well known that groups with low levels of education and skills, those who did not acquire competences considered as *minimum* requirements, suffer selective exclusion in labour market (Hövels, 2001). Also, several epidemiological studies have demonstrated the existing link between deficient socio-economic and educational conditions and a greater rate of prevalence of mental pathologies, obviously due to the disadvantageous circumstances which some people have been exposed to (Ferrero, 2003b; Tidball-Binz, 2000).

As other authors underlined, social exclusion is related to structural factors, as economic-technological, socio-demographic, institutional and political ones, and to cultural factors, as values and expectations of roles and a deprivation culture in isolated or even excluded groups or communities. Even though social exclusion can happen to anyone, there are some particular groups at risk; in Argentina, as in many other countries, these groups are especially those with low income, family conflict, school

problems and living in a deprived neighbourhood (Coimbra, 2000; European Union Funded Research on Education and Training, 2003; Gavilán, Quiles, & Chá, 2005).

Therefore, it is fundamental that the guidance processes increasingly promote the inclusion of concepts related to the social context, as it is precisely towards this field where their application is geared to a greater extent, even in individual processes of orientation (Aguado, 2000; Hiebert, 2005). From this point of view it must be also considered that counseling practice is also influenced not only by theoretical models, but by its ethical, political and social objectives (Guichard, 2002).

In countries like Argentina, it has been necessary to redefine some of the traditional objectives of vocational guidance in the light of increasing changes. However, because of the prevailing conditions within the majority of the population in many Latin-American countries, the task of vocational guidance has distanced itself from its initial purpose to move towards the attention of urgencies, thus being in a paradoxical position given that greater psychosocial problems tend to diminish the capacity for orientation, providing in many cases, only a rudimentary solution. The shortcomings in those countries affected the established educational agencies in the provision of training, and the education system was severely damaged (Wallenborn, 2001).

Considering that the “at risk” groups for lifelong learning are the low skilled and qualified and the unemployed ones, safety nets in the organisation of effective school-to-work transitions have to be necessarily increased. There is no doubt that sociolabour environment is constantly changing and individuals are more ready to face this circumstance if they can make autonomous decisions, also regarding vocational endeavours (Benavent, 2003; Drawin, 2004; European Union Funded Research on Education and Training, 2003; Romero, 2004; Stevens & Watts, 1999).

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICAL STANDARDS IN ARGENTINA

In Argentina, vocational guidance is one of the psychology competencies, and that is why this task is mostly carried out by professional psychologists. The increasing inclusion of social responsibility as part of the processes of vocational guidance has, as an antecedent, the multiple references in national and international psychology ethics codes. Undoubtedly, as many other concepts that are geared towards an ethical practice of psychology, social responsibility is intimately related to the respect and dignity of people. Thus, from an ethical viewpoint, all types of practice in the field of Psychology must be based on the inescapable respect for human rights (Fernández, 2006; Ferrero, 2002, 2006; Knapp & VandeCreek, 2003; Leach & Harbin, 1997; Lindsay, 1996; Lindsay, Koene, & Øvreeide,

2008; Martínez, Buxarrais & Esteban, 2002)

In fact, in 1997, the *Protocolo de acuerdo marco de principios éticos para el ejercicio profesional de los psicólogos en el Mercosur y Países Asociados* [Protocol of Framework Agreement on Ethical Principles for the Professional Practice of Psychologists in the Mercosur and Associated Countries] established *social responsibility* as a general and basic principle of the scientific and professional practice of Psychology, stating that:

“Psychologists practice their social commitment through the study of reality and promote and/or facilitate the development of laws and social policies aiming, specifically, at the creation of the right conditions for the development and welfare of individuals and communities” (Comité Coordinador de Psicólogos del Mercosur y Países Asociados, 1997, p. 2)

At the same time, the ethics code of the Federación de Psicólogos de la República Argentina [Psychologists’ Federation of the Argentine Republic], stated in 1999, includes what had been previously established by the *Protocol of Framework Agreement* reiterating the commitment existing between profession and society, as it is considered in many other psychology ethics’ codes. Social responsibility is related to care theory as it represents a moral attitude with an epistemological and practical meaning in moral life. This point of view includes not only traditional deontological theories related to values such as autonomy and justice, but the need of trust, shared knowledge and shared responsibility in professional and scientific practice (American Psychological Association, 2002; Dobson & Breault, 1998; European Federation of Psychologists Associations, 1995; Federación de Psicólogos de la República Argentina, 1999; Graham, 2001; Hermosilla, 2000).

We must also consider that the Ethics Standards of *International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance* (IAEVG) (1995) outline the importance of social responsibility in many of its articles. For instance, in the section referring to *Ethical Responsibilities to Clients*, it is stated that members of IAEVG must respect the dignity and the rights of those to whom they provide educational and professional service, and they must have updated information regarding laws and policies related to the rights of the clients (Art. 1°). In the same section, it is pointed out that counselors must promote equal opportunities within educational and vocational guidance without any kind of prejudice with regards to social background, education, gender, race, ethnic origin, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or disability, thus avoiding any discrimination (Art. 2°). It is even outlined that the task of orientation must be carried out with sensitivity to all the needs of the clients (educational, vocational, personal and social) if they interact and affect the planning or adaptation to education and guidance, occupations and careers (Art. 3). Finally, this

section enounces that clients from mis-represented groups must have equal access to the best available techniques (Art. 7°). The section referring to *Attitudes to Government and Other Community Agencies*, states that counselors should support the development of professional and educational orientation services in such a way in which these can be provided ethically and with relevance to the needs of the clients, in close collaboration with politicians and legislators (Art. 1°). Regarding the *Responsibilities as an Individual Practitioner*, it is outlined that the practice must reflect the humanistic principles underlying ethical behavior as well as the attention to any changes within social and political issues that are relevant to the practice (Art. 3°). Also this section outlines the need to control and maintain professional competence and to receive continuous training in order to enable the provision of services according to client's cultural diversity (Art. 4). Counselors must be aware of their own values and attitudes, avoiding all manner of discrimination and stereotyping on the basis of race, gender and age (Art. 6°) (IAEVG, 1995).

From this perspective, it is possible to appreciate how different types of regulations, either the Ethic Codes of Psychology of Argentina or the Ethical Standards of the International Association of Educational and Vocational Guidance, have given prime value to a high level of professional commitment to the society where vocational guidance is carried out (Ferrero, 2005; Klappenbach, 2004; Pettifor, 2004; Pettifor & Horne, 2001; Waring, Bore & Munro, 2003).

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

Considering the international competency framework for the vocational guidance, it is possible to confirm the great importance that the social context has within the *International competencies for educational and vocational guidance practitioners*, approved by the IAEVG General Assembly, that took place in Berne, in 2003 (IAEVG, 2003).

The *Core Competencies* state that professionals have to demonstrate different skills related to social conditions: appropriate ethical behavior and professional conduct in the fulfillment of roles and responsibilities, awareness and appreciation of clients' cultural differences to interact effectively with all populations, ability to communicate effectively with colleagues or clients, using the appropriate level of language, and social and cross-cultural sensitiveness (IAEVG, 2003).

The *Specialized Competencies*, include competencies referred to different fields: Assessment, Educational guidance, Career development, Counseling, Information management, Consultation and Coordination, Research and Evaluation, Program/Service Management, Community Capacity Building and Placement. Most of these competencies remark the importance of social

responsibility in relation to the guidance task:

- Assessment: "Conduct a needs assessment of the clients' contexts" (p. 1).
- Career Development: "Identify influencing factors (family, friends, educational and financial opportunities) and biased attitudes (that stereotype others by gender, race, age and culture) in career decision making" (p. 2). "Knowledge of state and local referral services or agencies for job, financial, social and personal issues" (p. 2). "Skills to use career development resources designed to meet the needs of specific groups (migrants, ethnic groups and at risk populations)" (p. 2).
- Counseling: "Assist clients in Social skills" (p.3).
- Program/Service Management: "Promote community awareness of the programs and services" (p. 4).
- Community Capacity Building: "Skills to develop relationships with key community partners. Conduct needs assessment of the community. Work with the community to effectively use these resources to meet their needs" (p. 4), "Work with community to develop, implement, and evaluate action plans to address economic, social, educational & employment goals" (p. 4) (IAEVG, 2003).

These competencies include the firm recommendation to use specific tools for evaluation that are valid enough, and to maintain continuous training and an adequate supervision if it is necessary. It has also been pointed out that in order to respond to challenges faced by orientation nowadays, professionals should improve knowledge, abilities and ethical decision making as the basis for praxis, and that it is necessary to develop further research on the role of social capital inclusion/exclusion in education and training. The relationship between values and professional guidance is related to different situations, such as including technoethics as a content of professional guidance, considering the meaning values at work, and developing a professional deontology. These issues might improve the competence of the professional guidance's process, both in a personal and in a participative perspective as well (European Union Funded Research on Education and Training, 2003; Cortés, 2006; Loewy, 2003; Stuart, 1999).

CONCLUSION

Every country needs to develop policies that combat social exclusion, but especially those with disadvantaged economic and social conditions in which prevail social inequality, material poverty, and a labour market prevail related to mechanisms that could lead to further educational inequality.

Education and training quality is related to equal opportunities and vocational education and training systems have to provide the conditions that make these opportunities real and extended to the whole community.

From this perspective, it is possible to state that social responsibility is in the core of vocational guidance, regarding not only ethical standards but the specific

competencies framework.

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