

REFLECTIONS ON VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELORS' TRAINING IN CONTEXTS OF GLOBAL CHANGE (1)

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Abstract

Vocational guidance (V.G.) is currently facing both theoretical and methodological reconsiderations. This demands rethinking ethical and scientific assumptions, counselors' role and training.

V.G. provides a space to receive information about oneself as well as about labor world and for the elaboration of projects for the future.

Many guidance situations in teenagers and young adults are described in this paper, highlighting the main current emergent aspects. There was a remarkable protagonism of those seeking guidance and the reflective frame of the guidance. This frame prepares for the educational stage changes and also for occupational insertion working on aspects that widen autonomous choice and the development of social abilities and attitudes to carry out the vocational project and the development in work.

Troubled sociocultural and economic transformations demand an on-going training on the part of counselors. To that end, possible fields of concern and subjects to be worked in said training are suggested.

The turn of the century finds V.G. and V.R.G.(Vocational Re-guidance) facing challenges and problems requiring a series of reconsiderations from theory, clinics, and prevention interventions.

Prevention, understood as change anticipation -either predicting, prognosticating or protecting from them- and also as intervention to explore and activate learning as well as life quality resources we find in those seeking guidance, in the educational system, in assistance centers, in labor organizations, in society.

Theory is leading us to wonder about the current place «psy» has within the scientific revolution, in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge, as regards sociocultural modeling of individual psyche and group and organization phenomena, and the remarkable impact of economic transformations in daily life as well as in personal projects.

This reconsideration demands a deep reflection on our scientific and ethical assumptions, on the role we play as counselors and counselors' trainers.

We may perhaps feel impotent when we think about vocational, professional and labor guidance in front of the magnitude that unemployment, underemployment and the scarcity of opportunities for young adults acquire. Guidance may be seen as placebo to be administered to a seriously ill person in order to appeal to his suggestion degree, figuring he is better.

However, at difficult times hope has to be sustained, there is the need to reconsider important problems, to rescue the solidarity towards those who need our professional accompaniment. This is precisely one of the roles of guidance: to provide a space and a time to think, to connect with oneself and the others having reasons to puzzle before their future. Guidance in order to have contact with the complex and varied information required to be able to choose feasible options, to learn about oneself and the educational and labor world, to detect fears and to highlight the desire of being in spite of mermaids' luring song inducing them to have, to consume, to go easy and to consider things lightly, to have pleasure as principle even at the expense of reality.

Guidance does neither forget nor overlook what is human at times when technology and economy tend to expose human beings to experiences of emptiness, marginality, prescindibility and disposability; experiences that make one lose one's sense of value and at the same time make one fear losing the significant place in the productivity of each person's life.

The type of consultation for guidance and re-guidance has undergone a striking change lately. Teenagers doing their secondary school often arrive at V.G. on the advice of their peers or their parents because «you have to decide on something» at the end of the secondary school.

Motivation is not strong at first when consulting. Some give it up when they are given a protagonic frame, a place to think about what is going on in them and to elaborate a personal project. Most of them continue guidance, though one has to resort to different resources and a patient wait in order to obtain an active participation, to do away with drowsiness of thought, or to make explicit the fears of the future and the choice made not only on the basis of convenience or social and family requests, but also the subject's deepest wishes.

More and more often we are receiving 19-26 year-old young adults in different circumstances:

- Those doing a course of studies, who had begun never asking themselves why. These young adults, once there, gradually de-motivated on the basis of poor results, either dropped out the course or continue not knowing till when;
- those who had chosen to study at tertiary or university level, leaving it soon afterwards, and currently work without satisfaction, wishing to find something that may interest them in order to continue training or to improve the labor perspectives;
- Other young adults who come because they are not comfortable in their job and wish to change, or else those who want to make a more satisfying life project
- Many of them come from the interior, and find themselves at a loss on starting university education in a context so different from the known one, in the midst of a personal

crisis, doubting whether to continue or give up.

Some of these situations shall be illustrated with the following clinical cases of V.G.:

- Juan is 19. He comes from a small city in the interior. His parents own some land, and he is the second of four children. He loves the country and agricultural activities but he is conscious he would not be able to live solely on that, owing to the reduced size of the family works and the fact that he would be sharing it with his brothers in the future. He consequently decides to enroll on Economic Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, as he considers it a good alternative for future job. However, his motivation decreases and he hardly manages to pass some CBC (Common Basic Cycle, an introductory compulsory course) subjects. He works and finds it difficult to organize his study. He would like to change to another course he may like more, or perhaps a shorter one.
- Lucas is 20. Also comes from a small city and his family is a large one. His eldest brother studies in Buenos Aires and does well. Instead, he started two courses and abandoned them. As a matter of fact, he does not really like studying, though his parents have convinced him that it is convenient if a better future is to be secured. Lucas has never striven for anything, neither does he show any marked interest for anything. His father is the one who takes the initiative and consults.
- Valeria is 22 and has been married for a year now. She is happily married. Both she and her husband work. She started studying Nutrition but it has turned out to be very heavy studying and working. She cannot stop working and would like to study something less demanding. She likes subjects related to the body, diets, gymnastics, and dance. She has been good at sports till she finished her secondary school.
- Mariela (23) is planning to marry soon. She studies Computer Science at the University of Buenos Aires but she is not making any progress. She thinks she has intellectual problems for she fails exams. She wants to know if her choice has been the correct one, because she likes the course even though she sees no progress. She considers studying at that particular university highly prestigious and that in that course only «gifted» (= very intelligent) people progress.

These different consultations frequently need a stage for exploration and elaboration of the personal issues before a vocational professional project may be suggested. We are facing an emphasis on the therapeutical side of guidance and vocational re-guidance, though this does not mean doing away with the preventive aspects.

V.G. and V.R.G. provide a reflective frame to dive into the consultants' subjectivity and to inquire into occupational-educational reality. This makes the construction of a meaningful personal project possible. It involves not only a course or an occupational choice, but also a way of living, preferences and values, self-knowledge, knowledge of reality, evaluation of alternatives, anticipation and preparation for vital changes.

The guided person emerges from a troubled situation with more consciousness of himself, being the protagonist of his own history and of his future projection. He expands the boundaries of his freedom and has the possibility of -up to a certain extent- creating himself.

In spite of determinants and limitations imposed on the subject by what is sociocultural, historical or economic -as transverse circumstances ever-operating on him-, he can still feel he is a social agent as from his guidance, as Touraine claims «the subject is the will of an individual to act and to be recognized as agent» Thus, the objective Freud favored is accomplished «where id was, the self must arrive» making the construction of a personal sense of one's own existence possible, inserted in social relations not only transforming the subject but also he can actively affect his personal transformation and that of his relations and opportunities.

This brings a reflective light counteracting the omens that predict the disappearance of the subject, of the self and the personal identity in post-modern times. It also reaffirms the applicability of V.G. with a clinical frame: to promote the protagonism of the subject, to rescue or increase his autonomy. Thus, in guidance and re-guidance there is a space-time for rational thinking, for revelation of enigmas, together with the proposal of assuming one's own subjectivity, freeing oneself from the nets of alienating forces (unquestioned social imagery, messages from the "light" culture, family commands disregarding the subject's wishes and knowledge, fears and ghosts haunting the person).

However, a difficult and frequently painful transition has to take place between the family and friendly world, with possibilities of free time and consumption, and the socio-economic and labor world out of the family, disappointing and hard, frustrating and demanding, asking more and more and providing less and less. There arise conflicts between preferences and economic convenience, between being and having, and many fears surround the thought of teenagers and young adults seeking a clearer vocational panorama.

We have found a significant crisis in teenagers who reluctantly continue with secondary school studies, who repeat the course or refuse to continue studying, claiming the continuation of the «juvenile psychosocial moratorium» if the family can afford that possibility, or wishing a brief course -of one or two years- with possibilities of getting job, on leaving secondary school.

Some male teenagers imagine their future as sportsmen -mainly, first division football players- some female teenagers simply wish to have time to finish their secondary school, while they are devoted to enjoying themselves (going dancing, being with friends, avoiding studying, which in terms of a 17-year-old girl equals to «confinement, boredom, desperation. A jail, endlessly waiting for the time to get out. »)

In general terms, they feel the pressure of the expectations put on them by their middle-class parents («that they finish secondary school»), when their own expectations are elsewhere (sports, technical/practical brief courses, working without studying beyond secondary school, even not finishing secondary school).

One thing is what the social imagery imposes on them as regards success and job competitiveness, on the basis of permanent training, graduate and postgraduate studies; and a very different one is what many teenagers and young adults are willing to perform.

Many young adults work while doing tertiary or university studies. Their jobs are frequently unrelated with their studies and, on finishing them, they find it difficult to get a job in their area of study.

The perception of the efforts made by the parents of middle-class young adults, who accumulate working hours in positions that are not those desired, or unemployment of the bread-winner, has negative effects on the elaboration of vocational and occupational projects. Said effects produce fear of the future and of putting themselves “at stake” for an option, and give rise to more or less depressive condition, thus making the definition of a personal project more difficult.

Vocational re-guidance consultation is frequent in the case of young adults working for large companies and studying courses related to their labor development (Business Management, Economic Sciences, Economics, Marketing, Industrial Engineering, etc.). These people usually come to a crisis after having studied for some years. They carry out a new analysis of what they expect from their labor life, how to combine their work with their personal expectations without surrendering their personal lives to economic convenience. They do not like either what they are studying or their job and wonder whether it is possible to recognize their preferences when making a professional choice.

Intelligent and educated young and adult people -even if they are already professionals- often show lack of motivation in relation to their professional tasks, discouragement due to the great degree of competitiveness and stress involved in the process not only of finding a position in the labor world but also in keeping it. They have the necessary intellectual and professional tools, but they are unable to find motivational and emotional resources, and refuse to accept the codes enforced in society as regards success, go-easy attitudes, deceitful speeches or the seduction to which they should resort to ensure their labor career. A 35-yearold architect told me that one of his colleagues with psychopathic traits got his work by seducing potential clients when they had already made arrangements with other professional, or by accepting to copy plans drawn by other architect or by discrediting his colleagues in order to strengthen the chances of getting their work. The person consulting me said that at that price -working dishonestly-he did not want to go on working.

It is not only a question of making a good choice and undergoing permanent training, but also

of displaying the personal abilities required to get a position in a difficult and highly competitive labor field. It is necessary to learn how to protect oneself from the “dirty tricks” played by professionals and organizations with psychopathic traits. Likewise, one should appear self-confident and as having confidence in one’s training and offer one’s services and knowledge convincingly.

To sum up, let us consider the **most outstanding emergent aspects in V.G. consultants in the 90s**, (it should be pointed out that such emergent aspects change as consultation progresses):

- Effort avoidance, difficulty to find desired goals and make efforts to reach them.
- Narcissistic traits: pulsional predominance; diffuse depressive signs, emotional indifference, emptiness sensation, boredom, difficulty to think about themselves and about reality
- hiperstimulation and acceleration to the extent of provoking personal or shared risk situations; frequent accounts of serious accidents, accidental death or suicide of relatives or young acquaintances
- Contraposition between the labor-economic order and the hedonistic-consumer one, which they have to leave aside with uncertain benefits
- Conflicts between hedonistic expectations and economic and social success demands difficulty in differentiating himself from an identity based on paternal guidelines and creating a relatively stable and consistent personal identity
- The *collage* metaphor, as an heterogeneous mixture of multiple contradictory senses, points out the new figures of the juvenile and adolescent subjectivity
- Women’s conflicts due to the new female roles imposed by social and historical changes, clashing between the new proposals and the loyalty to ancestral models of female identity
- Expectations of profitability, occupational success and economic self-sufficiency are increasingly frequent among women joining the labor economic cycle. However, there are contradictions between the private and public female roles which have psychic consequences: feelings of blame, dichotomies between family life and professional-occupational life, difficulty in supporting and strengthening personal achievements, contradictory family messages
- Significant amount of vocational re-guidance or occupational reinsertion consultations on the part of young adults -20 to 35 years old- of both sexes, single or married; in these cases, the problems found are more complex, with non-elaborated mornings, and persistent neurotic and narcissistic conflicts.

The importance of developing a better professional qualification of counselors in

order to consider the various personal, social, educational, vocational, labor and specific aspects (transcultural problems and problems concerning the feminine gender, unemployment, labor reinsertion, adults, people in marginal or risk situations) in the different guidance areas: educational, vocational, occupational and clinical, was pointed out in the last National and International Conferences on Vocational Guidance. Postgraduate training should prepare counselors

- To promote choices based on a deeper knowledge of the self and of the occupational alternatives, preventing failure and educational drop out
- For re-guidance in the case of failed vocational or occupational choices
- In the transition between different educational cycles
- In relation to the connection between education and the labor world
- As regards the vocational use of free time

The modules or contents of counselors' training should comprise

- Knowledge of contemporary regional and global reality
- Updates in:
 - a) Vocational and professional development psychology
 - b) Group dynamics and coordination
 - c) Personality psychology and contemporary psychic problems
- Knowledge of mental health, labor and educational organizational analysis applied to vocational guidance
- Labor psychopedagogy (learning, detection-solution of disfunctionalities and labor insertion-reinsertion optimization)
- Education and labor
- Ongoing education (adults' training)
- Knowledge of macroeconomics
- Auxiliary technical resources in V.G.
- Gender labor problems
- Problems arising from labor or educational marginal situations
- Supervised practices in the different areas of V.G. and V.R.G, according to the attendants' basic concerns.

Notes

1. Paper presented at the Vocational Guidance Seminar at Tornú Hospital on «New Guidance Alternatives in a society in crisis». Opening round table, November 26, 1997.

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