

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING IN LATIN AMERICA. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CRITERIA OF COHERENCE, COOPERATION AND QUALITY

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Abstract

Guidance in Latin America as a field of professional training, in comparison with Europe and United States, is an activity of recent acceptance in academic scene. The same has been characterized by a constant evolution in its eagerness to adapt to the new changes and social, political and economical transformations that occur in the Latin American continent. In this communication a general view appears about Guidance in this continent. The main considerations formulated are related to four dimensions: a) public policy dimension where the present situation and the proposals appear on the matter; b) the contextual dimension that makes reference to the counselor training and the different action settings; c) the organizational dimension that is related to the provision of this service, and d) the methodological dimension, where the main aspects related to the Guidance practice are developed.

Key words: Latin America; Guidance; Guidance dimensions

A. Introduction

The present paper related to the guidance process in Latin America, emerged as an attempt to raise awareness, especially to European countries, the most significant details of the discipline in the geographic region between the South River Bravo in Mexico to the southern region of Argentina. This region is formed by Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panamá, Perú, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Including, of course, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Dominican Republic.

This paper is presented to address issues related to the status of Guidance and Counseling in Latin America, mainly those concerned with the four examined dimensions: a) the public policy dimension, which presents the current status and proposals; b) the contextual dimension that refers to the formation of the East and the different scenarios for action, c) the organizational dimension that is related to the provision of the service, and d) the methodological dimension where the main aspects related to the practice of Guidance and Counseling in the region are developed.

B. General Considerations of Guidance and Counseling in Latin America

"The Vocational Guidance and Counseling professionals in Latin America have had a career, though short, quite significant and important in the development of our people"

(González, 2007-2008, p.44). In this regard, it is pertinent to emphasize that the number of professionals dedicated to this discipline has been growing steadily. Maybe not as much as we would like, but sufficiently to be felt in most government institutions where their professional services are required. At this time, the presence of this professional is evident in educative institutions depending on the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor, and Ministry of Youth and Women Attention; it is also common to know about their action in response to at-risk populations, such as in cases of drug use and unwanted pregnancies among adolescents. In other countries guidance counselors have established in the private performance of this discipline.

Moreover, the emergence of Guidance and Counseling in Latin America can be traced back in Brazil, in 1931, when Laurence Filho created the first state Career Guidance service in Sao Paulo (Carvalho, 1995, quoted by Melo Leal-Silva, 2004).

A second important date related to Guidance is stated by Gavilán (2007), when he expresses that the proper birth of Vocational Guidance, in a systematic way, was in Brazil, "by the hand of Professor Emilio Mira y Lopez, who established in Rio de Janeiro in 1947, the most comprehensive Institute for Selection and Professional Guidance of the continent." (p. 75).

At present, the movement of Guidance counselors in Latin America is strengthened internationally to the point of being recognized by the International Association for Educational and Occupational Guidance, which has included a long time ago, a representative of the region as a member of its Principal Board. Likewise, the movement of Guidance professionals has been consolidating to the point of presenting today a Latin American Network of Guidance Professionals which encompasses a fairly representative group of professionals in the region. Furthermore, the number and quality of events, conferences and seminars for the analysis of relevant issues is becoming increasingly noticeable.

Although the significant progress of Guidance and Counseling in America is recognized, it is also necessary to emphasize that, in general, as expressed by Gonzalez (2008), in Latin America can be recognized at the moment, at least four groups of factors or elements that should be addressed if we want to improve the action of Guidance and Counseling. These factors can be located in four major spheres. These spheres are: policy, institutional, foundation and the targets of these services.

Within the political sphere may be mentioned that Latin America is not a compact unit with the same interests. In this sense, González (Ob. Cit) considers the existence of three major blocks of countries with different social settings. They can be grouped, "on one hand, by Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Mexico. On the other, by Colombia, Puerto

Rico, Dominican Republic, Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, Uruguay and Peru; and another group, formed by Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador and Honduras." (P.15). In this case, the search should be directed towards moving forward with a unified approach but keeping our diversity and differences.

The institutional sphere represents the school, as a location from where the guidance practice takes place. Many have always believed that education and guidance disciplines are complementary and that guidance should be an activity which facilitates the idea of the continued integral formation from Education. In the specific case of Latin America, one of the institutions that received the largest number of claims and demands of adaptation is the school. In this sense, Mora (2008) has emphasized that "the current school, instead of liberating and transforming, dominates, preserves and reproduces the contradictions and inequalities it meant to be."(P. 13). It is therefore an urgent priority to design policies to improve the functioning of the School as a formative institution of youth in Latin America.

The foundation sphere is managed with the view that the theories underlying our practice is based on models imported from other countries and cultures, but fortunately, initiatives have been being developed which will strengthen a better practice more linked up to our idiosyncrasies and less dependent to the Euro centric patterns of Counseling.

The sphere related to the guidance targets has to do with the point stood by Blat (1981, cited in González, 2008) "Latin America ... is not a seamless whole ... There is an America with mainly indigenous people... A mulatto America ... with high percentages of black race; an almost European America in the southern cone: an America of mixed race of white and indigenous people..."(p. 14). Consequently, taking into account the needs of these clusters is imperative when preparing the action plans of the guiding and counseling role.

B.1. Public Policy Dimension

The idea of public policy is conceived as expressing Roth (2006) when he says that this is "... a set comprising one or more collective goals deemed necessary or desirable ... which are handled, at least in part, by a government institution or organization with the aim of guiding and counseling the behavior of actors ... to change a situation perceived as unsatisfactory or problematic" (p. 27).

Although it is recognized that, as Melo-Silva says (quoted in González, 2008), one of the weaknesses of professional guidance and counseling is the "absence of effective public policies that make more effective implementation of services for the majority of the population "(p. 4), it is fair to acknowledge that efforts are being made to improve

this deficiency. At this point it is appropriate to emphasize that on Latin American Professional Guidance Day, April 28, 2008, the first reunion between representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education and the University of Carabobo was held in Venezuela to consider developing a structured policy aimed to establishing a process for admission to higher education that is tailored to the needs and philosophy of government representatives.

Among the main conclusions of this Technical Committee, the following parameters that can be considered as the initial steps for the public policy formulation in the field of Guidance and Counseling were established as a consequence of the agreement:

1. Guidance and Counseling should be viewed as a continuous, planned, integral, inter-transdisciplinary and integrated system designed to offer to the citizens, throughout their life and from the educational system, the possibility of personal-social development, prevention and management of conflicts and risk situations in a democratic, participatory and autonomous way for the social welfare.
2. Guidance and Counseling should be considered as the priority in each of the levels and/or educative subsystems, and must therefore be addressed as a public policy of state.
3. Arrange a Technical Expanded Bureau with representatives from all stakeholders including professional organisms. The date and place will be determined by the Ministry of People's Power for Higher Education.

In the same way at the proposals level, the following agreements were established:

1. Consider the creation of Guidance Commissions at the national, regional, state and local levels.
2. Include the Role of Guidance in the Draft Law on Education, as well as the role of Supervision.
3. Consider an Entry, Continuation and Exit System of Higher Education instead of just a University Education Entry System.
4. Facilitate the opening of undergraduate studies in Guidance and Counseling.
5. Include in teacher training careers, mandatory modules, not alternative, related to guiding and counseling areas.
6. Restructuring the guidance policies; this should be established jointly by the Ministry of People's Power for Higher Education, Ministry of People's Power for Education and National Guidance and Counseling, which in turn should redefine its Vision, Mission and Goals.

7. Integrate and incorporate Guidance and Counseling on curricular activities at all levels or subsystems of education; defining the areas to meet and function of guidance counselors.
8. Bringing about the adoption of the Professional Practice of Guidance and Counseling Law introduced by the Venezuelan Associations of Guidance Counselors Federation (FAVO, in Spanish) in the National Assembly.
9. Create Guidance and Counseling Departments in each of the Colleges or University Institutions.
10. The concept of Guidance for self-determination or self-development is proposed instead of the term Vocational Guidance.
11. Situating Guidance and Counseling as the linking organ between the Ministries responsible for Education, Higher Education and Labor.
12. Developing the idea of Vocational Re-Guidance.
13. Create a Technology Network for Vocational Exploration.
14. Allocate more resources for Guidance practitioners training.
15. Highlight jobs and study offers in non-traditional areas.
16. Highlight a stronger link between university and work.
17. At the entrance to Higher Education, the generic and specific competences should also be considered.
18. Developing the idea of professional courses for people who do not have a degree in Guidance careers, but want to join it. These professional courses will be considered as a measure to cover the immediate shortfall of guidance counselors.
19. Reconsider the function of the Guidance and Counseling or Mentorship on programmed times.
20. Developing a profile of the students.
21. Conducting a census to locate guidance practitioners' population in the country.
22. Promote the creation of the university career choice.
23. Establish learning modules that allow students to be explored vocationally from elementary studies.

Finally, a structured plan of action was formulated as follows:

1. Develop an Entry Census to Higher Education System.
2. Develop a diagnosis that reflects the reality of the Guidelines, including Guidance and Counseling at the Higher Education level.

3. Review the legal, theoretical and epistemological bases of Guidance and Counseling.

B.2. Contextual Dimension (Supervisor training and action scenarios)

With reference to the Guidance professionals training, it is worth mentioning that in most Latin American countries there is no career with a degree in Guidance and Counseling, apart from Venezuela and Costa Rica. In most countries this function is carried out by psychologists.

One variable that is currently being considered, for the future, in the formation of guidance professionals in Latin America is the flexibility. This approach, according to Barajas and Fernández (2007-2008) "... focuses on the change in the way knowledge is transmitted, institutionalized, organized and managed, fostering self-autonomy through creativity, self-regulation and freedom of action in time, place and manner". (p. 50). In this case, for the same authors, a curriculum model that incorporates the flexibility "should support a system of credits and no subjects or semesters: a core group of mandatory subjects with the addition of optional subjects for a given training ... formative activities (professional training ... also promoting interdisciplinarity... through the inclusion of different programs ... and universities ...) "(p. 51).

A research conducted in Argentina, by Imbroscia and Siniuk (2008), tells roughly the average situation in Latin America. In their research these authors state that in the five school districts in Buenos Aires "only 27 percent of institutions have provided adequate space for the practice of guidance and 30 percent of schools has no professional staff designated for its practice". On the other hand, they indicate that "91 percent is active in targeting high school institutions". As for the training, 35 percent has university degrees, 61 percent a third level degree and 4 percent has both degrees. "

Among the trends, the idea of conducting professional courses has strengthened, especially for those who are not professional guidance counselors that could be credited to two years for its performance. This would be a temporary measure only as an urgent situation.

In the case of Mexico, as an illustration for Latin America, Crespo (2008), has noted that "... there is a great need to develop guiding multidisciplinary education ... and (with) a complex view..." (p. 126)

The second proposal for guidance professionals formation is outlined by Maura González (2004), focusing on the fact that Guidance and Counseling should be conceived from an educational perspective, if possible, from the approaches of the Career Education and the Historic-Cultural approach of Human Development (self-

determination), rather than from psychological approaches (behaviorist, factorial, and personality-centered).

B.3. Organizational Dimension (service provision)

The part related to the organizational dimension must consider what to do with defining the concept of it. The service provision will depend on the definition to be handled in these cases. Among the many contributions being made from America, the definition suggested by Lessire and Gonzalez (2007) can be included, which states:

"Guidance and Counseling is an activity developed to support the individuals to analyze their needs, diagnose their chances, consider their prospective vision to build their lives projects, and going along with them for the implementation of an improvement program; with the aim to ensure their adaptation to historical and cultural context in which they are meant to work." (p. 212)

"Guidance and Counseling has evolved over time from labor to school and now to social and community action ..." (Gomez and Ramirez, 2005, p. 264)

B.4. Methodological dimension (the practice of Guidance and Counseling)

There is now in Latin America a movement to reform aspects of the Guidance and Counseling practice. In this regard, voices have risen to express the need to rethink and redefine the theory and practice of Guidance and Counseling. One of them is Vilera (2004), a Venezuelan who states that this rethinking is equivalent to revise guidance and counseling from a transdisciplinary perspective; and he also states the search for new theories, models or approaches to address new cultural ever changing views nowadays. Moreover, this author suggests that guidance and counseling do not deal only with matters related to student achievement and social adjustment, but should also include other aspects such as "... social inclusion, strengthening of democracy and the rule of law, promotion of humans rights, the restoration of duties and rights public life, culture of peace, the economic momentum with equal opportunities, active citizen participation in local, regional and national cultural processes" (p. 3). Additionally from Venezuela, Vera (2003) suggests that for improving guidance and counseling practice, it is necessary to reflect about the possibility of developing a formal pedagogy for guidance counselors' formation more suitable to our characteristics and idiosyncrasies.

Another important consideration related to the guidance and counseling practice comes from Argentina, in Rascovan's words (2004), suggesting "deconstructing one of the strongest concepts introduced by lectures and practices of vocational counseling from a clinic point of view ... This concept is *Vocational Identity*" (p. 3). Also from this country, Gelves (2006) reminds us that the speech we used to express the youth that *they will be what they decided to be*, seems to have no effect, because the life-choices today are conditioned to "the possibilities each one has in his/her own family, social class and cultural patterns ..." (p. 45).

From Mexico, Lopez (2004) noted the need to abandon the developmental model which is only aimed to become Guidance "...on an instrument to the service of the production media" (p.3), so that these individuals are to the service of the economic development decided by the leaders in turn in that country.

From Chile, Olivera (2004) emphasizes the idea that changes can not occur only with changes in attitudes and designing new technical roles. Guidance and Counseling require creating people "with a critical, self-reflective, empowering, everyday-action-centered consciousness" (p.2).

Finally, from Uruguay, Hansen (2006) gives us the idea that Educational Guidance and Counseling exceeded the notion of school life adaptation and points to the idea that rather than helping to make decisions, Guidance and Counseling should be based on how to develop a continuous construction for work and life options.

C. Conclusions

The main conclusion formulated about this topic of Guidance and Counseling in Latin America is related to the fact that, according to the criteria of Coherence, Cooperation and Quality, combined and sustained efforts have been made to meet these criteria.

With reference to the coherence criteria, there are serious proposals concerning the establishment of a guiding and counseling system initiated in the elementary school and that, through a accompanying process, can reach the higher education level, even trying to assist the young people in getting their first job. In the same way, a founding theoretical structure is trying to be developed and reinforced, which can establish, articulate and apply the basic theoretical principles for Guidance and Counseling to get a better pertinence sense with the Latin American reality.

Furthermore, about cooperation, great efforts are also being made to establish and strengthen an inter-transdisciplinary cooperation conception among the disciplines related to Guidance and Counseling, what would let consider the Guidance and Counseling subject from a global perspective; and there are also efforts aimed to getting cooperation among the fundamental actors in Guidance and Counseling

function, such as the school, parents, teachers, peers and the community, sharing the Guidance and Counseling responsibilities with other actors, apart from the Guidance and Counseling professionals themselves. To whom, in addition, more up-dated formative planning should be reformulated.

And finally, with reference to the quality of Guidance and Counseling criteria, initiatives tending to formulate the basic quality criteria that should exist among the professionals of this discipline, are being made. So far, taking into account the global world where we live, at present the professional competences suggested by the International Association for Educative and Vocational Guidance are being revised, and also trying to be widened so they can cover essential aspects that for cultural issues are not being considered in the properly.

Notes

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