

A PARADOX: INCREASED PSYCHO-SOCIAL PROBLEMS – LESS COUNSELLING INTERVENTION

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Abstract

This work is based upon conclusions drawn from the research project: "A Profile of vocational occupational counselling and placement and employment services" in La Plata and greater La Plata (Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina). This research was carried out between 1998 and 2002 and explored four axes or systems: Health – Labour-Social Policies and Education..

In the case of this last axis, reference was made to information about school counselling teams (psychologists, psycho-pedagogues, social workers, etc.) who should have the responsibility for the counselling task, and moved their activity towards the attention of urgencies requested by educational institutions, to cope with current psycho-social problems, losing sight of the importance of counselling from a prevention perspective, for avoiding possible risk situations. Results achieved within this context (La Plata, capital of the Province of Buenos Aires, Ensenada and Berisso), due to the strategic importance of the region in the national context, allowed us to establish meaningful relationships, correlations and projective inferences in other social and regional spheres.

Key words: counselling; school; paradox; prevention.

I. Introduction

This paper was part of the research Project "Profile of vocational and occupational counselling and placement and employment services" (1998-2001), which was carried out by the chairs of Vocational Counselling and Preventive Psychology of the career of Psychology at La Plata National University, Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

This research aimed to know the state of coverage, level of intervention, training, methodologies and practices in vocational and occupational counselling and placement and employment practices in the region of La Plata and Greater La Plata.

Its closest antecedents and referents were the investigations made by Dr. Anthony Watts from England, in his work entitled: "Occupational profiles of Vocational Counsellors of the European Community" (1992)¹, especially his abridged report presented before the European Centre for Professional Training (CEDEFOP), and the works by Drs. Stuart

Conger and Bryan Hebbert², from the Canadian Foundation of Counselling and Employment.

The present work is based on the ample specialized literature related to the redefinition of Vocational Occupational Counselling and on our own research work in this field, addressing the conceptualisation of the new role of the counsellor, the current conceptualisations of counselling, their links to the work environment and unemployment (Gavilán, M. 1996³; 1997⁴, 1999).

In the first stage of the Project, we defined operationally: 1. Services of Vocational Occupational Counselling, and 2. Services of Placement and Employment:

1. *Vocational Occupational Counselling*: we included within Vocational Occupational Counselling services all those institutions, work teams and/or professionals that carry out specific tasks associated with Vocational Occupational Counselling, at the preventive, assistance, and community level (group or individual work) within the institutions or called upon from outside by the same.
2. *Placement and Employment Services*: those work teams, independent professionals and/or non professional workers who carry out tasks related to work placement of persons who have lost their jobs, work conversion and/or help in the search for the first job.

This research began by studying the provincial and municipal charts with the object of sorting and systematizing field work, with the aim to locate where these institutions worked. As we carried out this task, we were able to observe that structures that were part of the charts were substantially smaller than the ones we found in the complexity of the local realities. Consequently, we decided to opt for our own course along those axes that satisfied the goals of our current research.

- a) *Educational Axis*: General Directorship of Schools and Culture of the Province of Buenos Aires, through the Secretary of Education and their main regional referents: the area inspectors. All schools were surveyed both at the Basic General Education level and at the polymodal level, at all system levels and modes and we included all school counselling teams depending from the Directorship of Psychology and School Social Assistance the psycho-pedagogical departments of La Plata National University (all its faculties and secondary education schools that depend from it, vocational counselling centres and work counselling programmes PROLAB). The Technological University of la Plata, located in Ensenada and the Catholic University in La Plata.
- b) *Health axis*: we surveyed all hospitals in the area of La Plata and Greater La Plata, Berisso and Ensenada and all the dependent units that from these institutions provide

some answers to Vocational and Occupational Counselling needs (Directorship of Mental Health – Adolescence Department).

- c) *Social Programmes*: Provincial Council of Family and Human Development. Provincial Council for Minors, Provincial Council of Disabled Persons, Secretary for Prevention and Assistance for Addictions, non-governmental organizations NGO's, colleges and professional associations.
- d) *Labour axis*: Production and Employment Ministry of the Province of Buenos Aires, located in La Plata and its area of influence covering Berisso and Ensenada. The National Directorship of Employment located in La Plata, unions and professional associations that nucleate them. Ministry of Agriculture.

For the purpose of this work, we shall take into account the Educational axis, the Provincial Educational System in general and the Directorship of Psychology and School Social Assistance in particular, as all school counselling teams, who share the responsibility of giving an answer to the counselling activity which is the goal of our research, are dependent on it.

II. The provincial educational system

The New Federal Law of Education⁵ was implemented in Argentina in 1993, and within its framework, the Provincial Government of Buenos Aires passes its own law in 1995, which causes in consequence a transformation in the whole structure of the provincial educational system. This latter law, in its first chapter, article 5, sub-subparagraph u, states : *the right of students to be respected in their integrity, dignity, freedom of conscience, of speech and the right to have access to counselling.*

The current provincial educational system is based on public, State and private educational units that cover the different levels and modalities of education.

The structure of the Educational System, according to the general principles of the Federal Law of Education and to the Province's own specific guidelines, comprises:

- a) *Initial Education*: It includes Nurseries and Kindergartens, attendance to the last year of which is compulsory;
- b) *Basic General Education*: which is a compulsory level, with a duration of nine years, starting at six years of age and divided in three stages;
- c) *Polymodal Education*: also compulsory within the province of Buenos Aires, and lasting at least three years;
- d) *Higher Education*: that takes place in institutes of higher education, which accepts those who have graduated from the Polymodal level.

Moreover, in its sixth article, the Provincial Law of Education mentions the total number of educational services included in its structure. It includes the Directorship of Psychology and School Social Assistance, and the Directorship of Special Education; it states that these directorships “*shall articulate with all other services, so as to further the goals, facilitate the passage and continuity and ensure the horizontal and vertical mobility of the students.*”

The General Directorship of Schools, as a consequence of these changes and modifications deriving from the implementation of the Provincial Law of Education at the BGE and Polymodal levels, introduces specifically some guidelines related to the Vocational and Occupational issue.

The current reform proposes that, starting at the third stage of the basic general education, BGE 3, curricular spaces should be opened to develop vocations”, providing each teenager with the possibility of making their own decisions “after having had a chance to do what they like”.

The existence of curricular spaces called Projects, Counselling and Tutorials, create the conditions and possibilities to address questions such as mediation, formation and projective tasks. The latter are related to the creation of an environment for reflection about the students’ expectations and their life projects, in such a way that they may achieve self-knowledge; to develop their aptitudes, skills, interests, aspirations; to recognize resources and limitations that will define the foundations of their decisions, establishing relationships between their personal characteristics and the educational and work options; getting information about opportunities and study conditions or work activities developing the habit of analysing different alternatives before making up their minds.

The counselling work has a fundamental importance in school from the third stage of BGE onwards; it can be visualized as a task that involves all teachers and that is part of daily practice.

In the same way, the creation of spaces for institutional options is considered, to be offered by schools according to their own resources and needs. We consider it very important to be able to offer through these spaces the opportunity to establish links between education and work, and/or instances of articulation with the Polymodal level, so that students become familiar with the different modalities. Thus, the inclusion of all the actors in the system is promoted, particularly the teachers, who are called upon to carry out this counselling intervention, creating conditions for children and adolescents to discover and define their fields of interest and develop the abilities and competences related to these interests. Special emphasis is made on the re-evaluation of the

counselling intervention that must be made by the School Counselling Teams, as the vocational occupational issue has lost some ground in the last years. .

From the survey that has been carried out, the following data have been gathered:

Number of educational services and school counselling teams:

- ✧ Within La Plata district, there are:
 - 82 Basic General Education schools. All of them have School Counselling teams, and 50% have a team for each shift;
 - 35 Polymodal Education Schools, 18 of which have Counselling services;
 - 23 special BGE schools, all of which have the support of their own Counselling teams.
- ✧ Within Berisso district:
 - 22 Basic General Education schools, 15 of which have School Counselling teams. Out of these 15, 5 have two teams.
 - 3 Polymodal Education Schools, which have only Social Counsellors;
 - 2 Special BGE schools, supported by their own school counselling teams.
- ✧ In the district of Ensenada:
 - 15 Basic General Education schools, 12 of which are covered by teams from the Directorship of Psychology and the other two have two teams each;
 - 2 Polymodal Education School, both with Counselling teams;
 - 1 Special BGE school, with its corresponding School Counselling team.

The Directorship of Psychology and School Social Assistance (Historical background)

This directorship, a supporting institution for the provincial educational system, was created in 1949 as a Directorship of Professional Counselling.

The importance bestowed at the time on this professional practice was due to the massive inflow of students into the secondary level in the 50's, with an infrastructure that was not prepared for such an event; a demand that surpassed the offer; the creation on a large scale of National and Provincial Technical schools and the recruitment of social groups that had never had access to secondary education.

This pioneering institution, both in the Province of Buenos Aires and in Latin America, includes among its professional founders Drs. Jaime Bernstein, Bernardo Serebrinsky and Nicolás Tavella who worked on the statistical aspects as well as in the areas of technique adaptation and Scale construction.

As soon as it was created, this Directorship called upon teachers with some training and interest in these pedagogical, psychological and social areas. In the specific field of

Professional Counselling, training was in the hands of the outstanding professionals mentioned above.

Later on, this Directorship changes its name to Directorship of Educational Psychology and Professional Counselling of the Province of Buenos Aires. Due to the large number of students included in the system (who came from industrial areas of greater Buenos Aires and from poor areas), it diversified and an increased number of problems was encountered. Consequently, the Directorship saw its dimension grow and, in 1956, it came to be known as the General Directorship of Psychology and School Social Assistance under the General Directorship of Schools of the Province of Buenos Aires. It assumes as its mission, to provide the different levels of the educational system, sharing the same modality, with contributions from the psycho-pedagogical, social and health disciplines, with the aim of facilitating and promoting adequate conditions for the educational process, assisting the different services.

The area of Professional Counselling became a Consultantship and had as its goals: to establish the guidelines, methodologies and techniques for Professional Counselling, through the Educational and/or Social workers in primary schools in the Province of Buenos Aires and/or as district teams.

The Directorship of Psychology in general and the Consultantship of Professional Counselling in particular acquire new dimensions when, in 1958, the Psychology Course at the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences at La Plata National University is opened.

This institution has come a long way and has not been exempt from the crises produced by institutional interruptions. We shall leave out a part of this history that has been the subject of another work⁶ and we restart in 1984. With the advent of a Constitutional Government, the Directorship of Psychology starts a new stage; the institutional working framework is modified; it does research and evaluates the tasks accomplished by the psycho-pedagogical teams relative to the prevention of school failure.

In a *first stage*, work is begun institutionally through an interdisciplinary approach called "inter-branches" (Primary School, Secondary School, Adults, Special, etc.)

In a *second stage* the Directorship is integrated to, coordinates and participates in inter-institutional programmes.

These were times of shared teaching improvement and the lines of study were based on "the Social aspects at School" and on the teaching community. Mention must be made here of the experience of the curricular reform in the Province of Buenos Aires, in 1985, when the 6th and 7th grades were introduced as orienting stages as well as the proposal of implementation of preventive programmes made by one of us in collaboration, as a

representative of the aforementioned Directorship. We may also mention the programme “Counselling for life” (for the prevention of drug addiction) meant for all the provincial educational system and carried out in conjunction with the different levels and modalities of the Health Ministry of the Province of Buenos Aires, a work that has been considered to be inter-institutional and inter-disciplinary. At the time when the programme was in a full decentralization process in all districts of the Province of Buenos Aires, paradoxically, its development could not go on as the new institutional administration –December, 1987- informed that the referred programme had been “too successful” in this issue as it had been awarded an important scientific prize for the Best Institutional Work by AAPSA (Argentine Association of Psychiatrists) in August, 1986. For this reason, they decided to cancel it and to discontinue the work of those professionals involved in it.

Unfortunately, both in this case as in that of other programmes, it was not possible either to evaluate or to further them due to discontinuities in the institutional administrations.

In the month of December, 1987, the administration is severed and once again the Directorship of Psychology experiences a cutback in its work space and its integrating role . This Directorship suffers a cutback in workspace and many professionals are removed to be sent into other institutional areas. .

The Directorship of Psychology and School Social Assistance at present

Our universe of study along the Educational Axis included all the school counselling teams formed by a school counsellor and a social counsellor, whose qualifying degrees cover the following disciplines: Social Service, Psychology, Psycho-pedagogy, Educational Sciences and Sociology) in the districts of La Plata, Greater La Plata, Berisso and Ensenada.

In mid 1999, fulfilling the schedule of our research, we asked the authorities of this Directorship authorization to use our exploring probe (survey) to evaluate the teams under its charge, given the importance of our task for this institution and based on an agreement that exists between La Plata National University and the General Directorship of Schools.

The authorities in power at the time refused to grant this authorization to carry out this task. This was due to the fact that the government term was about to end in the Province of Buenos Aires and the diagnosis might not favour the administration, this being the reason why we had to alter our work plan, to continue furthering other axes and to wait for the new leadership to assume the Directorship.

From the year 2000 onwards, and with the change of leadership, a new stage of renewal and training within the educational system begins, especially at the Directorship of

Psychology and School Social Assistance). The new authorities accepted our proposal, collaborated to facilitate the task with the purpose of sharing the results and the proposals originating from it. Since 2001 up to now, this Directorate has emphasized the role of preventive and counselling work, trying to train the professionals that form the School Counselling Teams through written reports and meetings where new theoretical frameworks and strategies of intervention related to these subjects were worked out.

III. Methodological aspects

Conditions were established for the administration of the instrument "survey". To this end, previous work was required for the presentation of the research:

- At the level of the Provincial Directorate of Psychology and School Social Assistance, where the agreement and the recognition of the importance of this survey for the area within the educational system were attained.
- At the level of the Management of Educational Region I, in the presence of its Chief Inspector and that of the Area Inspectors from La Plata, Berisso and Ensenada, with whom the analysis of the instrument to be used was also discussed and suggestions were accepted that favoured its implementation.

Thus, the organization and operative level, required to achieve the survey of collected data, was attained; this was done by calling upon all members of the Counselling Teams that filled the positions of School Counsellors and Social Counsellors in the different districts.

The survey was then held within the framework of successive meetings organized exclusively for this purpose. These meetings were scheduled by inspectors in groups of around 30 counsellors. It is noteworthy that the support shown by the Inspection team contributed to guaranteeing the assistance of almost all the personnel.

Each of these meetings was preceded by the design of a new framework by the inspectors, while the research teachers in the team delved into the goals of the study, its purpose and foreseen mechanisms to complete the survey.

In general, we perceived a very good disposition in the personnel. In addition, many interests were expressed, linked to the subject under analysis. While we were present and throughout the completion of the survey, numerous questions were asked by participants which were addressed to the research team, demanding assessment and proposals for the vocational/occupational issue in educational institutions

Although variables to be explored and their categories were numerous, for the purpose of this paper, we shall only focus on the following levels of analysis:

1. Level of Teaching

2. Most Frequent Requests
3. Performs Vocational Counselling tasks
4. Training in Vocational Counselling
5. Need of Training

Analysis

1. Regarding the *Level of Teaching*, at which the surveyed teams worked, 82% were BGE schools, although in the case of 16 schools that represent 5% of the total, the BGE and Polymodal levels coexisted; 11% worked at the Polymodal level exclusively; 2% were Primary schools for Adults. No tertiary level institution team was recorded.

Another relationship can be established that in part modifies the percentage of teams that service the Polymodal level, if the 16 schools that have both levels (the last BGE stage and Polymodal level) are included, the percentage thus becomes 5%. This analysis may prove meaningful as long as the teams that work for these institutions look after the problems faced by students attending the Polymodal level, though for the purpose of Vocational Counselling, they must do so in articulation with the team that works for the corresponding BGE school as the students attending the third stage, probably on being incorporated to integrated schools, they have already made a first choice regarding Polymodal modality (See Graph 1).

2. *Most Frequent Requests*. In this sense, we analysed information about those questions that are most frequently encountered by the teams, and that are part of their daily activities, and we found a prevalence of activities related to consultations about *learning difficulties*, which are mentioned by 18% of those surveyed, a task that the school counselling teams have historically coped with and that is a specific part of their work (in this kind of activity, the psycho-pedagogues are more trained than the psychologists)

In the last few years, other social demands have come up that are reflected in the institutions' management and that permanently put the teams on the move. These demands generate worries and necessitate training for a successful approach. Among these, we may include *violence* in schools (19%) *family crises* (19%) and *economic problems* (15%); this can also be seen in schools where in the past no massive problems arose. These are conflicts that affect - and interfere with - the processes of teaching and learning and with life inside these institutions. The incorporation of new problems to the working scenario of teams means a reduction of availability and time for Vocational Counselling tasks, according to statements made by the teams' own members, at the time of the administration of the surveys.

The teams also answer requests linked to problems of drug addiction (10%; sexuality 8%, AIDS 4%, nutritional disorders 2%. Only 5% say that consultations are related to Vocational Counselling.

This once again confirms the importance of giving new meaning to and redefining this field within the framework of these new and complex problems and social scenarios that are denounced by institutions as a function of the symptoms that are detected (see Graph 2).

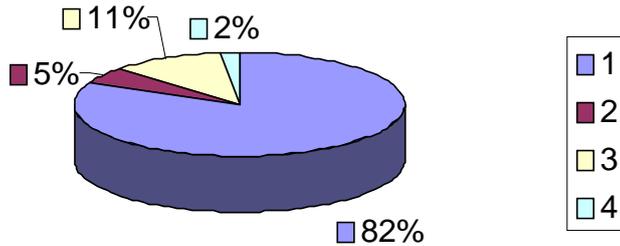
3. *Carries out Vocational Counselling interventions.* Out of the 320 surveys that were reviewed, 139 acknowledge carrying out Vocational Counselling tasks (50%), while 106 counsellors say that they do not (40%); 25 do not answer this item in the survey (10%).

The analysis of the following items demonstrates that, in fact, of those who admitted carrying out vocational counselling tasks, 95% only worked on the informative aspects, by setting up panels with professionals, reading study guides and organizing visits to training centres (for those who work at the Polymodal level) and a similar approach restricted to school visits for those who work at the BGE level.

It is an activity that is implemented in the last part of the school year, in order to cope with, to answer, minimally, adolescents' worries faced with imminent graduation from high school (see Graph 3)

4. *Training in Vocational Counselling.* To the question whether they have training in Vocational Counselling, only 12% answer in the affirmative and 85% say they have not had any training; 3% do not give any answer. This contradicts the answers given by counsellors when they declare that 50% of them carry out vocational counselling tasks and in particular with variable 5 (see Graph 4)
5. *Need for training.* Out of the total number of professionals in this survey, 88% answer that they need training in Vocational Counselling and in particular, they define the subjects in which they are most interested in studying in depth (see Graphs 5 and 6)

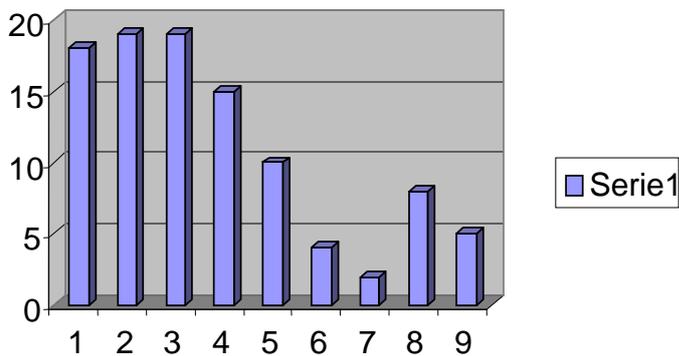
Graph 1 – Level of Teaching



Data reference

- 1- 82 % BGE
- 2- 5 % BGE and Polymodal
- 3- 11 % Polymodal
- 4- 2 % Primary School Adults

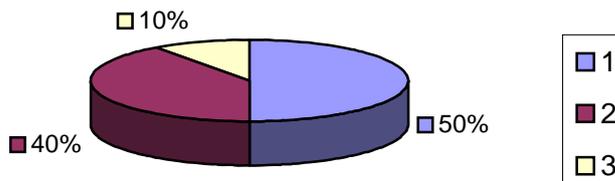
Graph 2 – Most Frequent Requests



Data References

- 1- 18 % learning difficulties
- 2- 19 % Violence
- 3- 19 % Family crisis
- 4- 15 % Economic problems
- 5- 10 % Addictions
- 6- 4 % AIDS
- 7- 2 % Anorexy-Bulimiaxxx
- 8- 8 % Sexuality
- 9- 5 % Vocational Counselling

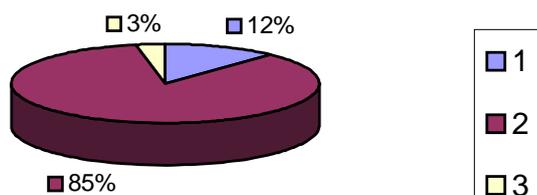
Gráfico 3.
Carries out Vocational Counselling tasks



Data Reference:

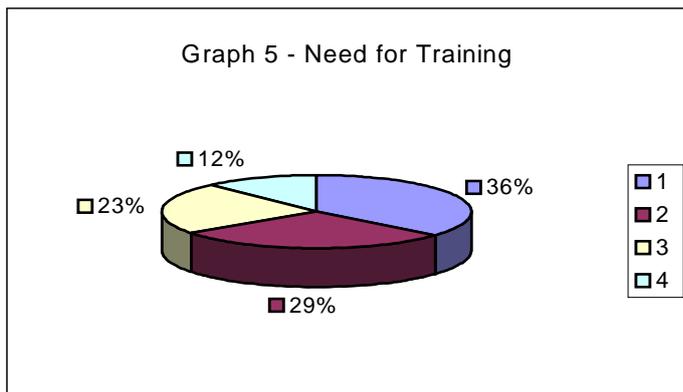
- 1- 50 % Yes They carry out Vocational Counselling
- 2- 40 % No, they do not carry out Vocational Coun tasksl
- 3- 10 % Did not answer

Gráfico 4 -
Training in Vocational Counselling



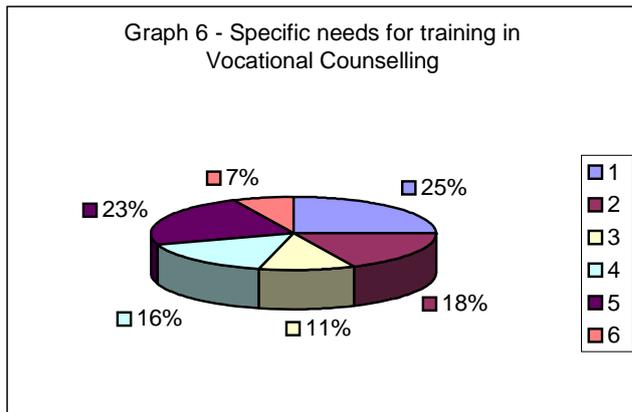
Data Reference

- 1- 12 % is trained in Vocational Counselling
- 2- 85 % is not trained in Vocational Counselling
- 3- 3 % Did not answer



Data Referente

- 1- 36 % Counselling Education-Work
- 2- 29 % Vocational Counselling
- 3- 23 % Work Counselling
- 4- 12 % Did not answer



Data Reference

- 1- 25 % wish to further knowledge in VC.
- 2- 18 % want to know about the Group Process
- 3- 11 % want to know about the individual process
- 4- 16 % want more information on VC
- 5- 23 % want to learn specific techniques in VC
- 6- 7 % Did not answer

IV. Vocational and occupational counselling from a preventive perspective

Currently we understand prevention as the capacity of a human being and the social group he belongs to, to anticipate, with varying strategies, situations that might cause diverse damage, thus making it possible to create and/or strengthen knowledge, attitudes, competence and values that will help avoid, or minimize, damage.

In the Chair of Preventive Psychology we propose an integral system of prevention that covers two distinct models⁷:

a) *Epidemiological- Social Model:*

It establishes its units of analysis within populations, at their diverse levels: neighbourhoods, cities, districts, provinces, regions, etc. In this way it becomes possible to set in context individual answers in terms of the social environment where they develop, to detect bio-psycho-social risk situations and to carry out mobilization techniques to face those situations and overcome the limits prescribed by the clinical model.

b) *Formal and Non-Formal Educational Model:*

These model is based mainly on the so-called formal and non-formal basic education and finds its context within the teaching community, considered as the axis of primary prevention, given the greater accessibility to an organic and majority system.

From these considerations, we deem convenient the constitution of an Integral Model for Prevention that combines and articulates the individual contributions of each these two

models, but in general within the educational system, Counselling is included in the Formal and Non-Formal Educational Model.

In preventive praxis, two main modalities are considered:

1. *Specific Prevention*: it aims at prevention based on symptoms. The direct and indirect consequences that have an influence on the different problems include several information levels and target fear.
2. *Multiple non-specific Prevention*: it is oriented to modify aspects related to “lifestyle” of groups. They aim at working on aspects that are subjacent in multi-causality, in modifying habits and attitudes in order to achieve a better quality of life.

These two modalities are necessary in prevention but we must take into account that their relative weight varies according to the application context (schools, hospitals, mental health services, marginal communities, etc.). Due to the nature of our integrated approach, we emphasize the value of the non-specific modality that we call “multiple”.

From the perspective of a multiple modality in prevention, we must consider that the Educational Institution may exercise a containment role – not an expulsive one – and that all actions that stimulate:

- Communication,
- Participation,
- Cooperation,
- Creativity,
- Counselling,

constitute preventive actions that help to achieve better lifestyles and as a consequence preclude falling into current psycho-social conflicts (marginality, drug-dependence, AIDS, family violence, bulimia and anorexia, etc.). Non-specific prevention within an educational institution aims at promoting knowledge and reflection on the aforementioned problems, through curriculum contents and the depth of analysis each group considers necessary. .

All the activities that have been previously enunciated should be performed jointly by teachers and the School Counselling team.

Within this framework, the task of Vocational-Occupational Counselling becomes of the utmost importance, under the leadership of the school counselling team and the collaboration of the entire teaching community.

We consider the term “Counselling” in a wide and all-encompassing sense. The term “to choose” is linked to freedom of choice; he who chooses an educational/labour project acquires more self-confidence and independence and distances himself from possible falls into psycho-social dependence or marginalization.

The choice of a lifestyle does not take place in vacuum, each individual constitutes a part of other social systems, such as the community, the school, and the family.

The school, an educational institution par excellence, offers a panoply of possibilities for coordination, systematisation and participation in preventive programmes.⁸

Being able to choose an educational and/or work environment makes it possible to try at other choices, friends, couple, community, work, etc.

In this way, through the actions of counselling groups, according to the possibilities of each institution, preventive actions are generated.

Every stage and each of the suggested actions must be supplemented with other resources available to the institution (audiovisual media, artistic expressions, student centres, suggestions' mailbox), inter-institutional, family and the community.

For the actions of assistance and rehabilitation demanded by clients, it will be necessary to communicate them to the institutions that currently devote themselves to those levels of intervention, in particular, to inter-institutional networks. We differentiate inter-institutional networks from social networks (that may complement and/or be part of them).

Vocational Counselling as seen from a prevention perspective, must be included within the framework of *continuous vocational occupational counselling or career counselling⁹* that should present two aspects:

1. On the one hand, it must be articulated both with the different plans and programmes existing within the formal educational system, compulsory education and post-compulsory (higher education, universities, poly-techniques,)
2. As regards non-formal educational systems, (professional training centres outside the system, university extension services, community programmes – governmental and non-governmental- compensatory programmes and other instances of counselling that each community may have).

Counselling from the perspective of prevention does not leave out the new psycho-social demands but it orients their treatment through inter-institutional and institutional resources (already mentioned); but in its turn it generates strategies to preclude the appearance of these problems or at least to reduce their number by means of the achievement of an educational, work, personal or social project,

V. Conclusions

School Counselling Teams (SCT), in close relationship with vicissitudes occurring in institutions, have undergone different phases of change and have progressed unevenly, so that the vocational occupational dimension of school counselling has been limited to

isolated initiatives, linked largely to level of training and experience of SCT members, the characteristics of the institutions and their historical traditions.

In spite of the modifications that have been attempted in the last few years, there is no counselling policy in force emerging from the provincial educational system. There are certain approaches and/or experiences coming from different academic units, which depend on the interest or voluntarism of those who, with different academic backgrounds and disciplinary contributions, attempt to give an answer to the school population's demand (in general, in final year of secondary school and in the second half of the school year). Thus, the educational system fails to provide adequate answers to the counselling issue. Moreover, we must add that our country does not have a history of continuity concerning actions and programmes of different political administrations, although they may have efficient technical criteria.

Members of school counselling teams today find themselves working almost exclusively with students close to finishing high school. The team members that carry out these tasks are the Social Counsellor jointly with the School Counsellor and, in most cases, they are limited to providing students with information, unsystematically, during the last months of the school year. Visits to Faculties and to Higher Education Institutes are made, career guides are made available to students and interviews or meetings with professionals in different disciplines, touching only lightly and work-related matters.

In this framework, the SCT that have historically carried out vocational occupational tasks, among other duties, find themselves overcome by questions associated with family crises, violence, learning difficulties, economic problems, addictions, etc., leaving them with little time to develop specific activities related to vocational occupational counselling.

Social demands to schools grow by the day, and today many community expectations and needs are centred on all these institutions. In the words of Savater:

"The task facing schools today is thus doubly complicated. On the one hand, it has to take care of numerous elements of basic education related to creating a social and moral conscience in children, something that in the past were the responsibility of a primary socialization process that took place at home. It must, before all else, arouse in them the principle of necessary reality so that they may accept to subject themselves to the effort of the learning process, a discipline that must be learnt before formal education begins, but that they have to provide simultaneously with high school subjects that traditionally belong to it."¹⁰

The Paradox

The provincial educational system, despite the good intentions of the new curricular reform, has failed to give a concrete and real answer to the problems that have been mentioned. Our field research has revealed other deficits and demonstrates the starting point of our hypotheses. Our theoretical framework considers Vocational Occupational Counselling from a prevention perspective and this implies the intervention of a set of institutional and inter-institutional strategies.

Psycho-social problems go beyond the activities of school counselling teams, and as they surpass their narrow margins within the system, obstacles appear and the work-load is reduced.

As a consequence, within the educational reality a paradox is constructed that has already been advanced in this paper's title: the bigger the psycho-social problems the lesser the counselling interventions. And this paradox shows a contradiction in the good intentions perceived in renewal attempts.

Notes

1. Watts, A. (1992) Occupational Profiles of Vocational Counsellors in the CEE (Abridged Report) CEDEFOP, Berlín.
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Recivido: November 2004

Aceptado: February 2005