

VOCATION IN THE INSERTION OF THE UNIVERSITY STUDENT AND THE GRADUATE

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Abstract

The work plan aims at deepening the analysis of the theoretic assumptions which support the practice in Vocational Guidance: analyzing the incidence of endogenous and exogenous factors both in the election and studying of a particular course of study and in the occupational resolution of the graduate. This analysis enables the revision and the new theoretic conceptualization which is afterwards transferred to the course, and to different groups and provincial institutions where the practice of Vocational Guidance occurs, as well as to other schools in the Northwest provinces of Argentina. Semiotic analysis, statistical elaboration and the research-action approach which, while surveying data renders a service to the milieu, provide the base for the project.

Said project focuses on the following individuals: 1) *freshmen*, who offer us the following aspects to be considered: a) factors which either favor or hinder the insertion of the students attending the first years of the course; b) the conditions making up the learning situation in each subject, from the teaching point of view; c) the influence of institutional dimension in the insertion process; 2) *graduands*: the characteristics of the situation following graduation from University, those of the labor field and the different ways of gaining access to it are investigated.

This analysis is carried out in the courses of study of Psychology and English (education of Professionals in English and English for Professionals).

Key words: Vocation; student; graduate; graduand; university

Introduction

The analysis of some issues related to Vocational Guidance has led us to particular attention to "vocation", for it results an enigmatic term of great significance in the relationship between Man and Work.

This, in fact, marks the position from which every man responds to the historical moment which he has to go through, thus conditioning his contribution to the future of humanity.

We were particularly interested in analyzing the role of "vocation" in the insertion of both the university student and the graduate in the labor market; therefore, we have taken into account two population segments: the university freshman and the graduate.

The high rate of people who give up, abandon or fail to progress in the course

indicates that the university freshman endures a high risk phase in his academic incorporation. Likewise, the graduate, on gaining access to the professional life, faces an ever worsening situation due to the uncertainty about his occupational insertion.

When focusing on the student's insertion, we have deemed it necessary to consider not only the inherent and concomitant factors to their being students, but also to enlarge the scope with the analysis of the teachers' position and the institutional requirements regulating the study of a course as well.

In order to dismiss the subjective aspects which account for insertion as the result of a vocational choice, we considered it appropriate to use not only statistical methods but also the contribution of both the semiotic method and psychoanalysis.

The problem of massive enrollment in the Psychology course also affects the English course, which was included in our project as well. Therefore, operational definitions and the following hypotheses were made taking in to account both courses:

- 1) The clear picture of the course chosen influences the student's insertion.
- 2) The socio-cultural context influences the student's insertion in the course.
- 3) The institutional context influences the student's insertion.

Within the hypotheses we selected the following variables:

In Hypothesis 1: we shall analyze motivation, occupational pictures, prestige, identifications, family history and fantasies. Such variables contribute to define a vocation. This constitutes a particular link to a "task" (occupation job) which becomes unavoidable for the individual, manifesting something about his "being".

In Hypothesis 2: we consider the family group, the student's economic situation, simultaneity of work and study, where the student is from.

In Hypothesis 3: we took into account building infrastructure, teaching staff, the ratio number of students - number of teachers, curricular design, auxiliary technology, budget, methodology used in the subjects and academic level of the freshman.

The analysis of the data collected led us to the following results:

I) Psychology course of studies

A- Freshmen

Students: a sample of 100 (a hundred) students in a first year subject (Introduction to Psychology) was randomly selected out of the 802 (eight hundred and two) students attending it. During 1995 we could obtain data from merely 68 (sixty eight) students, who were followed up in the following years.

During the second year (1996), the original sample further reduced to 44 (forty-four)

students, this indicating abandonment of approximately 35% between 1995 and 1996.

Finally, in the third year, the sample reduced to just 30 (thirty) students indicating 56% of abandonment between the first and third years, i.e. from 1995 to 1997.

The research corpus was obtained through the implementation of a series of strategies designed to achieve a discourse corpus where the "representations-interpretations" that the different protagonists have about the mentioned facts materialize.

In this sense, surveys and workshop techniques were carried out which provided the basic data for this study.

What follows is the conclusion from the analysis of the collected data:

In the *first year* students are still doubtful as to their choice of a course, because the answers about the factors influencing the election were not significant.

One of the reasons that would explain this result is that only a 50% of the students participated in Vocational Guidance processes; therefore, the other 50% did not have the opportunity of analyzing the motivations for their choice.

Correlating these data with the insertion in the course, in the first year the fact that 69% of the sample reveals having difficulties with the subjects becomes significant. It is also in the first year where the highest rate of conflicts corresponds to the subjects not specific to the Course of Psychology, such as Introduction to History which evidences a 45%. Students attribute this to comprehension difficulties (42%) and poor high-school education (31%).

In the *second year* the strengthening in the election of a course is expressed (93%), the crucial factor being a greater understanding of the sense each subject has within the course. Students think that for a better insertion they need "participation in Vocational Guidance processes", more information about the course (29%), modifications in the Initiation Program (29%). These worries are absent in the University freshman population.

In the *third year* we find the reassurance of choice of course made based on a more specific notion of Psychology and of what the profession involves.

Among the *socio-cultural* factors exerting a negative influence on insertion, the weightiest one in the students making up the sample is the economic factor (50%) for 80% of them come from other regions in the province and/or other provinces.

As regards the *institutional* factors negatively affecting insertion, we mark the deficient building infrastructure and the high number of students attending the course (57%).

The curriculum is considered a negative factor for insertion (57%) for the time assigned to each subject is perceived to be insufficient, lack of classes on theory for specific subjects, overlapping of academic activities, badly organized timetable preventing regular attendance, difficulties to obtain the number of credits assigned per year. Let it be added

that 77% of the sample have experienced failure in exams some time.

The quality of the teaching staff as well as curricular and extra-curricular activities suggested were indicated as positive factors.

Statement ranking revealed a positive judgment on the fact of attending the course in relation to vocation. The references more often made were concerned with the affective-emotional field, a standpoint from where the *synthesis* between the elaboration of the students' sense of belonging to both the course and the institution and the pertinence of the academic task takes place.

It is worth highlighting that none of those manifesting that the course does not match their expectations –which would apparently presuppose a negative judgment as regards the relation "attendance-vocation"– refers to failure or success in the studies. On the contrary, they state causes linked to factors related to affective-emotional or judgment aspects, which are connected to teachers' attitudes or the quality of the academic staff. These hinder the construction of the process of identification with the course and/or institutional sense of belonging.

Teachers: The analysis of the collected data reveals that teachers consider "*giving up*" their respective subjects a consequence of the clashing requirements between credits and the "regular student" status, schedule overlapping and excessive curricular obligations, among others.

As to the *curriculum*, 78% of the teaching staff does not acknowledge the existence of a curricular space for the articulation between the different chairs which, if present, would favor learning on the part of the students.

As far as the *institutional* field is concerned, all the teachers indicate the need for a substantial improvement of the resources available: space, alternative schedules for the different subjects, which would improve the conditions in which lessons are given.

Institutional dimension: students' insertion in the course of Psychology starts with the analysis of the program which is articulated in the course curriculum.

The curriculum is divided into two stages preceded by the so-called University Initiation period, lasting a month.

The above mentioned stages called Initiation and Professional encompass areas which in turn comprise related subjects. These areas replace the graduate courses, thus allowing some choice in the subjects to be attended.

Each subject has been assigned credits depending on whether it takes the whole year or a four-month period, and can be either compulsory or optional.

As regards the subjects, some depend on the Faculty of Psychology and others depend on the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters (Logic; Social, Modern and Contemporary History; Philosophic Anthropology and Modern Languages) and those that despite the

fact that they depend on the Faculty of Philosophy are provided with teaching staff appointed by the Faculty of Psychology (Epistemology, Cultural Anthropology Matters).

The present curriculum was implemented in 1992, and in December 1994 the Superior School of Psychology becomes the Faculty of Psychology.

In August 1996, the Assessment and Curriculum Commission made a diagnosis, completed in November 1997 with proposals to optimize the curriculum as regards the prerequisites in compulsory subjects and advice on optional subjects. The number of credits required to graduate as a psychologist is cut down from 100 to 93 by Resolution # 1913, 09-26-97.

Our goal was to attempt an analysis of day-to-day work of an institution pressed by the unbalance between resources and educational demands and the lack of proportion between the number of students and the teaching staff.

Only the first stage, comprising the first three years of the course has been considered, due to lack of time, taking into account the opinions of students and teachers as well as institutional organization.

The present curriculum was based on already existing structures, thus making not only the contents but also the lack of tradition in the field of planning and pedagogic updating prevalent.

The new educational offer seemed to have produced merely superficial changes, therefore the lack of differentiation between the old and new curriculum in the practice tended to reproduce actors, relationships and teaching practices.

The naturalization and timelessness of problems have led to the hiding of a major part of the curriculum.

The division of the course into two stages has not made clear how to differentiate them, nor has it defined the goals to be achieved by each of them; therefore there is an ambiguity as to the bases of their designation.

We wonder, in fact, if the first stage mainly deals with theory and the second one relies more on practice, or if the first one deals with general theories and the second focuses on the disciplinary theoretic field, or if the sequence goes from abstract to concrete. These are questions deserving an answer to then formulate the goals for each stage and, consequently, to define the areas making it up with their respective subjects.

The difficulties experienced by those having conformed the corpus would be:

- Lack of explicit goals as regards the stages and the areas making them up.
- Repetition of contents in different subjects.
- Difficulty to perceive the subject coordinator's presence.
- Lack of articulation between subjects.
- Simultaneity of responsibilities to be fulfilled, such as exams and mid-term

tests.

- Lack of information on both students' and teachers' parts.
- Difficulty in the articulation of knowledge between prerequisite subjects.
- Lack of coherence among education, research and transference.
- Practices are not always supervised consequently they lose their educational meaning.
- Most of the teaching staff have no pedagogic education.
- The lack of space led to an arbitrary reduction of teaching hours.

A proposal for action would be a process of controlled innovation, no attempt being made to find universal solutions.

It becomes of uppermost importance to recover a shared general objective, maybe already existent but dispersed, where that that is new would be the institutionalization of the pedagogic dimension that guides the task of the Faculty of Psychology.

An urgent issue would be to define and share strategic goals regardless of the tactical differences and heterogeneous options that may exist to achieve them.

Therefore, it is necessary to create spaces for dialogue within the curriculum and to get teaching staff to update pedagogically.

Reflection on the experiences and their new significance becomes essential among those sharing the task of educating an open-minded professional, capable of facing new problems.

Programming, criticizing and considering the experiences in a reflexive and plural space could signal the beginning of a qualitative modification without affecting the necessary autonomy.

The determination of the graduates' abilities could not be achieved but through examination of the educational processes and relationships; this will prove beneficial for access to the labor market.

B- Graduands: "The situation following graduation from University and labor insertion"

Our research also considered a population segment made up of graduands (students about to finish their graduate studies and newly-graduated professionals). As a first step in a more extensive research, we start with graduands and graduates from the course of Psychology.

Many manifestations from these groups such as expressions of disorientation, confusion and utter anguish, or other ones were less obvious such as inhibitions for taking the last final exams were considered indicators of an existing situation for us to keep in mind. Although Vocational Guidance has its main focus of research and assistance on high school leavers, the moment of graduation from University and the

initial transition to the world of labor are also important themes to be studied. More than 20 years ago, Rodolfo Bhoslasky in his book *Vocational Guidance: the Clinical Strategy* mentioned that we can accept the idea that graduation from University and the choice of a specialization become a moment bearing at least the same importance as entrance to University. This author emphasizes the possibility of repeating the vocational crisis arisen at the time of choosing the course of study, and thinks that the relationship the graduate is to have with his field of work shall depend on how such choice has been elaborated. These statements are still valid nowadays but the addition of new changes in the economic and social situation make the situation of the graduate even worse. At present, greater competitiveness, important unemployment rates, internationalization of labor markets, and new demands in post-graduate education, do not make leaving University on finishing studies tantamount to getting positions related to the course taken. Moreover, the underemployment of senior professionals or in some cases the closing down of consulting rooms, blur identification references.

Our research aimed at having a more profound knowledge of such special moment when decision making plays an important role in leading a vocation towards a professional task.

Few and scattered antecedents exist on the subject, mainly having a sociological point of view which tends to be based on statistics. References on the importance of the issue can be found in texts about university and economic matters, no systematic approaches being available. It is worth mentioning the existence of a Guidance Service for Graduates at the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and the inclusion of some aspects related to the situation following graduation in the Vocational Guidance course at the Faculty of Psychology of Córdoba.

The theoretic framework we chose is defined by the contributions made by Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan.

The works of Piera Aulagnier and Gerard Pommier on specific issues are worth mentioning among the many authors considered.

Historical analysis also made up this theoretic framework. Hugo Vezzetti was our national referent and Elizabeth Roudinesco and Kurt Danzinger were some of the foreign ones. A modified notion of *field*, developed by Pierre Bourdieu, was also of great use.

The corpus was conformed with material from individual interviews, group work and surveys to both graduands and graduates. These activities provided us with the elements to consider the subjective positions involved when confronted with the situation of choice following graduation.

On the other hand, a historical exploration provided us with information on the processes of conformation of the field of Psychology in our country and the professionalization of the psychologist. Thus, we could appreciate the changes the profession of psychologist has undergone in the different scientific and social contexts.

The analysis of the characteristics of *psy field* (*psychology field*) in which the insertion of the newly graduates takes place, provided descriptions and a better understanding of what field means in different cities and towns of the province of Tucumán and the Argentine North region.

- In the so-called "situation following graduation" we find a feature to be taken into account when suggesting activities for said population: what can be considered a crisis, an overt disturbance, seems not to be socially authorized. This constitutes an important difference with high school completion. An immediate insertion' of the graduate is expected and those conflicts typical of that moment thus go often unnoticed. The graduate is faced now with the consequences of a decision taken long ago, and not paying the attention due to the conflicts this involves often lead to early retirements from the profession or to positions of success. Therefore, besides organizing workshops where we could directly approach the formulation of a vocational-occupational project, it was necessary to find other ways –due to the anxiety this generated– such as the Workshop-Course which introduced mediations to the conflicts in question through the incorporation of historical issues. In this way the approach to personal problems of each course participant was carried out as the result of their own decision.
- The historical exploration was made with specific studies about history of psychologists in Argentina bearing in mind the function of the ideal in each moment. The interviews to professionals, protagonists of the beginning of Psychology course in Tucumán provided us with valuable data for our purpose.
- The results of the research point to a certain way of considering the problem we deal with. The line our research followed did not emphasize the information about the labor market of psychologists, but rather paid attention to the subjective positions in the situation following graduation situation and to the incidence of the Ideal in the access to the discipline and occupational field. This implies a differentiation in relation to the thought that one works in "whatever is available" (a student's actual words: "I'm going to work in whatever is available") as well as starting to consider how something (available or not) constitutes a possible job for somebody.
- Having had as starting point a statement representing the youth's worries: "What can one do?", which makes reference to the existing possibilities in a field of work, we introduced modifications in the meaning of the phrase on the belief that this statement entailed other issues. We related the difficulties of the "what we can do" with that that

is allowed (qualified or not) the qualification depending on the "Ideal" function.

Moreover, we noticed that "to do" is in case of students and psychologists linked to the problem of "COMING TO BE". "I don't know how to be a psychologist," a phrase from a young graduate referring to her difficulties in her clinical practice, combines the link between "to do" and "coming to be" already mentioned. It is also essential here to consider the function of the Ideal.

- Another question also present in our research was: In which way an initial motivation (helping, curiosity, etc.) articulates with actual doing according to scientific methods and theories and also according to a social control of the professional performance? The Freudian notions of pulse and identification have been the bases from which we dealt with the question. The inclusion of the term vocation related to the already mentioned concepts and linked to Freudian sublimation has meant a theoretic effort the consequences of which are still being investigated.

- In the population segment we work conflicts arising from the identification references in which they look for answers to the "coming to be" are frequent. As regards said references, the historical analysis brought about knowledge about them in the different moments of the history of psychologists in Argentina. It was possible then to measure the conflictive interdiscourse relationships (scientific, ideological, political ones) having incidence in the constitution of an Ideal. The consideration given to this issue led us to elaborate and suggest the Faculty of Psychology a new optional subject: "History and Task of Psychologists in Argentina", which we consider necessary in the curriculum.

We also noticed that while students attend the different subjects, little attention is usually paid to that that motivates each student, instead of going deep into it and relate it to a particular task. It is worth mentioning the frequent confirmation of the effects of the "super-ego" imperatives over propitiatory functions of the Ideal of the Ego.

- The psy field notion has proved highly beneficial to analyze access and permanence in the field of work. We based said notion –and made certain modifications to it– on what Pierre Bouvedieur defined as field; i.e., intellectual, discipline, and institutional field which has a relative autonomy from other fields, with factors making it up as well as specific properties and rules. The psy field operates as mediator and inclusion of the psychologist in his own task. The study of the characteristics of these fields in cities and towns from other regions made possible to value the problem of migrants in their decisions of working in their places of origin, where the psi field is almost often nonexistent.

A graduand wondered: "What does to be a psychologist in Amaicha del Valle mean?"

These reflections led us to think over the relationship the Faculty has with its graduates

and the role it can play to contribute to the formation of those fields and to the support its graduates in them. To that end, we have suggested a Guidance and Support Program for the Graduate, which encompasses many activities, and which shall surely benefit those who return to their places of origin. This is the way in which the Faculty establishes a closer relationship with the milieu and accompanies its graduates in the complex transition to positions it has educated them for.

II- English course of studies

The statistical and semiotic analyses provided quantitative and qualitative data that would point the causes for giving up the course of English could be attributed to different variables, mentioned according to the dimensions under study:

Students attribute them to

- The excessive number of students in the different subjects,
- The difficulties to adapt and follow the rhythm and requirements of university studies,
- The extreme difficulty of the subjects English Grammar I, English Grammar II, corresponding to the 2nd. and 3rd. year of the course respectively, and being absolute prerequisite of other subjects, prevent a normal development of the course,
- The lack of space to properly follow a class,
- The timetable overlapping, namely, of specific subjects with the optional or general ones,

Teachers attribute them to

- lack of linguistic abilities on the part of students,
- the excessive number of students, which makes both a personalized attention and the meticulous follow up of the students' learning impossible and utopian, *sine qua non* requirements for the acquisition of English as foreign language in the education of professionals for the teaching of said language. This is especially the case if no modern educational technology is available which facilitates and increases the possibilities of obtaining excellence in the education of our graduates,
- a deficient high school education which prevents them from successfully facing the requirements the university studies chosen pose on them,
- the inadequate space, which implies overcrowded classrooms to which not the whole of the students enrolled can get access, thus generating the pedagogically unacceptable situation of students who attempt –unsuccessfully and with a great feeling of frustration– to follow classes from the aisles, absolutely unable to

either see or hear the teacher, let alone of actively participating in the lesson, which are not expository but require constant students' participation in an ongoing teacher-student interaction.

The Institution attributes them to

- The deficient number of teaching staff in relation to the number of students, which prevents the formation of a greater number of groups so as to work in small groups that would allow the teacher-student interaction to take place,
- The lack of adequate information to students about the functioning of the Faculty as regards government, regulations, schedules, etc.
- The inadequate space,
- The lack of suitable furniture to work in order and successfully.

Course Curriculum

The students agreed with the subjects included in it, with its organization and with the way lessons are given, except for two of them (subjects: English Grammar I and English Grammar II).

Teaching staff refrained from voting either in favor or against.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the dimensions considered, some coincidences on an important number of aspects to be taken into account derive:

- Excessive number of students;
- Difficulties to adapt to the rhythm and requirements university studies demand due to the deficient high school education;
- Insufficient space and furniture for the normal development of the teaching-learning processes;
- Insufficient information about the administrative functioning of the Faculty they are entering, ignorance of students' duties and rights, and timetable overlapping confusing and disorganizing students.
- The conclusions obtained through analytical operations of the discourse from students and teaching staff on choice, vocation and insertion, allowed us to acknowledge certain relationships and establish the conditions in which they are produced. They are important so as to:
 - Update the contents of syllabus for the subject Vocational Guidance.
 - Suggest actions aiming at improving the insertion situations.

- Attempt at getting a less conflictive labor insertion for graduates.
- Transfer the results of Vocational Guidance Workshops carried out for freshmen, graduands and also other individuals related in some way to the Faculty of Psychology.
- Give a new significance to the practice in Vocational Guidance both in its attendance-required mode and distance mode, taking place in high schools of both the Capital city and other regions of the Province.

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