

# EQUITY AND GUIDANCE: THE CHALLENGE OF A PROPOSAL

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## Abstract

This proposal corresponds to a university extension project, established and funded by the University Extension Department of the National University of La Plata. This interdisciplinary and interagency plan was part of the transference activities performed in our last research project: *Vocational and Occupational Guidance in schools of high psychosocial vulnerability*.

The project is assigned to students in their final year of “polimodal”, from the population under investigation. It pursues the following purposes: supporting to restore self-esteem, discovering the individual and social potentialities and being able to develop a life plan, which includes the educational, training, personal and labor fields, through different disciplinary and interdisciplinary strategies.

**Key words:** Guidance; Vulnerability; Inequality; Interdisciplinary

“Equity and Guidance” is a challenge that takes part in our current research project. The proposal depends on the Science and Technique Department and it’s called: Evaluative Investigation on vocational guidance strategies to facilitate in reverting psychosocial Inequality.

This project is run by professionals who worked on the proposal, represented by the chairs of Vocational Guidance and Preventive Psychology, the Vocational Counseling Center from the same university, and professionals from the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences (Arts career) and the Faculty of Journalism and Social Communication.

In the following paragraphs we’ll refer to the project and we will also point out some conclusions related to its development.

## Introduction

A high percentage of students achieving graduation from “polimodal” level, belonging to educational institutions with high psychosocial vulnerable population, besides featured by job insecurity and marginalized families, are in genuine inequity to face the competitive world nowadays. It’s known indeed, current world increasingly demands training and multifunctional performance and it’s expected solid personal aptitudes.

The institutional practices of teachers and students are marked by a new role assumed by schools, which consists on “holding / without having”<sup>\*</sup> and an emphasis on retention (quantitative) and staying (without a rigorous analysis of sense) of the students in the educational system. This mode is clearly inadequate when it’s necessary to think about issues related to making future plans.

An attitude "resigned and powerless" prevails in speeches and tales of principals and teachers whenever alluding to the weak development of plans, situation that gets more serious due to the “unworried” vision of future that students from those vulnerable schools have.

The researches results related to Vocational Guidance in different schools and in particular, information got in a recently completed study, entitled: “Vocational Guidance in schools of high psychosocial vulnerability”, became the background which allowed this university extension project to be implemented in selected schools from the districts of La Plata, Berisso and Ensenada. The proposal was submitted to the University Extension Department of the National University of La Plata and approved to be carried out during 2006 and until today.

The project under consideration is interagency and interdisciplinary, and it’s dedicated to consider the issues associated to the graduation situation of young people belonging to the above quoted schools.

### **Represented Institutions:**

The institutions which are represented in the present program, are the following:

- I) General Schools Department, Province of Buenos Aires
  - a. General Education Council
  - b. Education Secretariat
  - c. Board of “Polimodal” Education
  - d. Districts Heads
  - e. Area Inspectors
  - f. Represented Schools (management and teaching staff)
  
- II) National University of La Plata
  - a) Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences
    - a1) Vocational Guidance Center
    - b) Faculty of Journalism and Social Communication.

### **Disciplines involved**

The disciplines that will be considered in this work, are detailed below:

1. Psychology
2. Arts
3. Journalism and Social Communication

## **1. Backgrounds**

By means of several research works and interventions carried out in the above mentioned institutions, from teaching activities at the Vocational Guidance Chair, we've observed and proved that students who graduate at high schools from vulnerable populations, generally have the following features:

- a) Inadequate training. These students have been at institutions with a lot of psychosocial problems, which still haven't found the appropriate strategies to respond to those problems, without undermining the education and counseling processes.
- b) Low self-knowledge. They fail to recognize the achieved learning – formally or informally - and so, they can't consider them to analyze critically their current situation nor face the future.
- c) High degree of disorientation. They have had little opportunity to reflect on their vision. Thus, they are trapped by the logic of the moment and the immediacy of the present.

Young people considered in our research haven't received systematic proposals of vocational counseling. Even they haven't reflected about their reality nor they are ready to look for alternative ways to make possible a working educational choice, taking into account the troubles that involve their everyday lives.

It is known that they scarcely know the educational offerings and resources in their area and that they have a significant degree of distortion. In some cases, the management and teaching staff from the referred schools disqualify the knowledge and learning achieved by these young people. It appears the feeling that, strictly speaking, "nothing can be done" or "nothing can be accomplished", attitudes that also become part of the representations that students have about themselves. Thus, it creates a vicious circle of despair and inability to do.

The above observations and findings were the initial ideas from which we began to conceive the present extension project.

## **2. Overall Purpose**

The overall purpose of this project arises from the challenge of the proposal:

Achieve that students take a leading role and, through a proactive position, can develop an education, employment, personal and social plan to diminish the inequality gap.

### **3. Specific purposes**

The specific purposes consists on:

- a) Create in teachers a commitment attitude to reflect deeply on the students' knowledge by means of training and the reflection on the subjects and problems already mentioned.
- b) Qualitatively improve levels of promotion and retention of students.
- c) Recognize and encourage the development of personal resilience to handle the future projects.
- d) Promote in students a better self-knowledge and also of the micro and macro-social reality.
- e) Encourage the development of a life style sustained by interests, values and desires.
- f) Develop the maximum of creative skills and stimulate the verbal expression.
- g) Facilitate the development of capacities for the education and job market to include young people in the new scenarios.

### **4. Methodology**

The methodology includes tools that are listed below:

- a) Institutional History
- b) Living stories
- c) Deep interviews
- d) Interviews with key referents, institutional and communal
- e) Reflection Workshops – operative groups
- f) Exploration techniques
- g) Study guides.
- h) Education and employment databases

These resources were applied taking into account the activities that we've developed and jointed in different areas: Teaching (Guidance Chair), Research (Science and Technique Secretariat) and extension (Vocational Guidance Center).

### **5. Expected results**

The expected results arise from the overall and specific purposes of the project. Indeed, since the selected strategies, we expect to achieve an increase in the number of graduates from the schools called of high psychosocial vulnerability.

Besides, try to make their graduations the lower level of inequality, this way students can build and sustain a project with future prospects, and training to find their inclusion in the world of work, study and / or personal or community venture.

Through better understanding of their skills and potentialities, and restoring their self esteem, we believe they can develop a proactive attitude, taking a favorable position in front of the requirements they will have when finishing high school.

We also believe that the adoption of new institutional strategies, aimed at reversing the situation of inequality, lead to more satisfaction for teachers in relation to the results of the teaching-learning process, and will become an incentive which will influence on the changes of representations that students have of themselves about the future.

The verifiable indicators must correspond to a greater number of students who complete high school. But besides that, they can also develop a project and sustain it, can be included in a higher education level or in a training system and, if possible, in the work world as well. This can be verified through the monitoring of young people in study and the proposed assessment.

## **6. Work Schedule**

The original project was intended to be used during a complete academic year. However, the first year started later due to some delays for accrediting the subsidy. That's why the original schedule was changed. Nevertheless, since the impact produced in the educative community in subsequent years, the experience began in a timely manner.

The work schedule has been parted into four stages. The tasks and its expected length are detailed as follows:

### **a) First Stage: March – April**

Analysis and diagnosis based on the background obtained through the ongoing investigation. Interventions with students, teachers and the community. Reflection workshops with teachers of the two last years of the “polimodal” level. Presentation of our proposal.

### **b) Second stage: May - July**

Working directly with the students on the last year of “polimodal”. Optional implementation of strategies according to the previous diagnosis, consisting on techniques of mobilization, expression and understanding of personal skills.

c) Third stage: August – October

Incorporation of coping techniques. Workshop of oriented information (first level) including its three phases. Introductory level training in microenterprises. Organization and integration between education and employment community institutions.

d) Fourth stage: November – December

Workshop of oriented information (second level). Continuation in deepening the integration of the second and third stage. Analysis and evaluation of implemented strategies. Evaluation of the process at the end of the extension project. Evaluation of the results in two stages: after six months of project accomplishment and after a year.

After three years since the implementation of the programme, we can talk about the achievements and the obstacles. Regarding the achievements, it's worth to mention the following:

a) The interest showed by the students in the continuity of the project.

b) Presence of the students in different proposals, even in those performed at extra-scholar schedules.

c) Elaboration of valuable literary materials, graphic productions, radials and audiovisuales.

d) There was an impact shown by the development, participation and communication of the students, which was also extended to professors and management staff. This fact motivated the inspectors and authorities of the General Schools Department, Province of Buenos Aires to request the enlargement of the experience to other similar institutions for the current year.

e) Creation of projects at the ending of the stage, to mid and long term.

f) Acquisition of the ability of participating and working in groups.

g) Development of communication capacities. This way, the singular voice feels empowered while the process goes on.

h) Management of their own projects, through the analysis of feasibility, and the evaluation of the current state, imagining wished situations based on reality criterions.

- i) Possibility of creating own messages about what is happening to them, what they feel, think and wish for their personal and social future.
- j) Active search on educational and labour information.
- k) Detection of the necessary projects for their own community.
- l) Capability of elaborating a curriculum and a job cover letter.
- m) Increase on the safety to choose and make decisions.

Regarding the obstacles, it's precise to remark the following:

- a) The initial delay on the first two years of the project.
- b) The professor's strikes.
- c) Giving curricular hours.

After three years of application, the current project has been selected by the Extension Secretariat of the National University of La Plata to be included as a permanent programme. Besides, because of the high impact generated on the educational community, the Florencio Pérez Foundation has decided, in the current year, to subsidize the proposal so that it can be carried out in different educational establishments.

It's remarkable that under this program, some advanced students have been included in the University Volunteer Program, under the Education Policy Department, Ministry of National Education.

Nowadays, we are in production and assessment stage, considering the joint with the research project previously mentioned, near it's end, and the monitoring of the young people that took part of the experience in previous years.

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