

## NEW CHALLENGES FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY: GUIDANCE COUNSELLING

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*Educational Psychology has come a long way in order to take its rightful place in schools. On this journey, conflicts with other disciplines have been frequent because as educational psychologists have unclear functions in their psychoeducational diagnosis and participation, other educational professionals have assumed some of their tasks, i.e., diagnosis of cognitive and emotional abilities or personality. These are tasks proper of Psychology; therefore, there is a need to incorporate School Psychologists in all Departments, Educational Teams and Schools.*

**Key Words:** School psychologist, guidance counselling, tutorial.

*La Psicología Educativa ha recorrido un largo camino para hacerse un hueco en el ámbito escolar. En este viaje, las colisiones con otras disciplinas han sido constantes porque el Psicólogo Escolar, al no clarificar sus funciones respecto al diagnóstico y a la intervención psicoeducativa, otros profesionales de la educación han asumido algunas de estas funciones, tales como el diagnóstico de la capacidad cognitiva, afectiva o de la personalidad. Estas funciones son propias de la Psicología, de ahí la necesidad de incorporar un Psicólogo Escolar en todos y cada uno de los Departamentos, Equipos, y Centros Educativos.*

**Palabras Clave:** Psicólogo escolar, orientación, tutoría.

In the western world, a strong research movement and educational approach called Effective School Improvement (ESI) is coming forth whose objective is the increase in the quality of education by improving the efficacy of the Centres (Muñoz-Repiso & Murillo, 2003; Thrupp, 1999). This increase in quality, following Negro (2006), has as its closest references "the movement of school efficacy", which pays special attention to the atmosphere, school culture, leaderships and degree of participation, and "the movement for the improvement of school", which highlights as key elements collective change, coordination and planning.

In this sense, an effective school (Mortimore, 1991), would be one that "promotes progress in every student regarding all aspects related to their performance and development over and above what is expected given their initial conditions and previous performance, assuring that every student achieves the greatest success possible and continues to do so every year" (p. 19).

This implies, according to Murphy (1992), setting out principles of equity (a school for all), of added value (absolute achievement is not valued but instead personal progress is valued), of comprehensive development (not only the conative level is valued but also the affective-

motivational) and of continuity (the exact effect is not valued but instead the achievement maintained throughout time). All these principles configure the ESI paradigm that, in practice, and according to Stoll and Fink (1996) and Stoll, Wikeley and Reezigt (2000) will promote a sustained change oriented towards united educational planning with the involvement of the whole school community, the participation of all agents in decision making, academic and professional development, the adaptation of the organizational structures to the learning style of each student and the promotion of creativity.

Such a substantial change needs a Guidance Model that would try to guarantee the integral education of students through the personalization of the educational process essentially in what refers to the adaptation of teaching-learning processes and the transition between stages and levels, with counselling and support of specialists.

To give expression to this model requires, on one hand, the implementation of a group of actions oriented towards the development of adequate means for the promotion of an education of quality, and on the other hand, a continuous process (integrating the actions carried out at tutorials and specialist counselling) which maximizes the adjustment of the educational project to the characteristics and needs of each and every student. Thus, every Education Centre must elaborate Tutorial Action and

Educational and Vocational Guidance Plans (Planes de Actuación Tutorial y de Orientación Educativa y Profesional), at the same time as it sets out the processes that will be used for offering a quality response to student diversity (Álvarez, Soler, González-Pianda, Núñez, González-Castro, 2002). Now then, this way of putting into practice educational psychology by means of the School Psychologist has experimented a considerable evolution since the late XIX century. At the beginning, between 1880 and 1920 it was closely linked to Special Education and later it became more centred on therapeutic models (1920-1955) (emotional, affective and social), scholastic models (1955-1970) (the psychologist behaves as a bridge between what is psychological and what is educational) or contextual models (since 1970).

According to Fernández (1988), there was a point of inflection in the sixties due to the great social demand for educational interventions that took place, especially in private centres, and also to the fact that the General Law of Education (LGE, 1970) formulated for the first time the right to School Guidance. In 1977, the first School and Vocational Guidance Services (SOEV) were created, initially with few members, only 2 or 3 per province, made up of EGB teachers and Psychology or Pedagogy graduates. In 1979, the Municipal Psychopedagogical Services (SPM) came into existence, greatly influenced by the community and preventive models of the corresponding health areas implemented in big cities.

After the coming into force of the Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled (LISMI, 1982) the Multiprofessional Teams (EEMM) were created with an initial approach closely linked to a medical-psychological understanding of Special Education which in turn impeded the more open psychoeducational approaches.

Now then, when an important change in the counselling models was really proposed it was with the RD334/85 for the Organization of Special Education, from which Integration Centres were promoted. In addition, in 1986 the SOEV and the EEMM were united, and from this moment on, they developed their functions on a national level, in Ordinary Centres as well as in Specific and Integration Centres. Such functions continued to be highly associated to preventive and socio-community aspects.

The LOGSE (1990), began to shape the model and the levels of action of educational and vocational guidance which are specified in the Tutorial (guidance class), with the specialised support of the Sector Team and the Guidance Department.

## THE TUTORIAL

The tutorial is the responsibility of teachers of all stages and educational levels, and its aim is to contribute to the personalization and individualization of teaching-learning processes and the mediation between students, teachers and families. Its functions are:

- The development of educational programs regarding conflict resolution for the improvement of coexistence, programs regarding strategies and study skills in order to improve teaching-learning processes and programs regarding academic and vocational choices for the facilitation of the decision making process.
- The facilitation of exchange with the immediate socio-family surroundings with the objective of generating a real learning community.
- The coordination of all teachers that intervene with the same group of students in order to guarantee the coherence of classroom programming.
- The collaboration with the remaining levels of guidance in order to promote a gradual and coordinated development through specialised counselling.

## SECTOR TEAMS

The weight of counselling and guidance in the sector is carried by the Educational and Psychopedagogical Guidance Teams (OM de 9-XII-92). These teams are classified according to the R.D. 696/1995 (art. 8.4), in: Early Assistance Teams (Equipos de Atención Temprana), General Teams and Specific Teams. The Early Assistance Teams according to Álvarez and Soler (1997), have as their fundamental competencies the early detection of educational needs in children in pre-school education and the counselling and support of parents. The General Teams, psychopedagogical assessment (OM of 14-II-96), counselling and technical-pedagogical support in Primary Education Centres. Finally, Specific Teams are in charge of specialised support for General Teams, Early Assistance Teams and Guidance Departments, in the case of students with special education needs associated to sensory and motoric disability, intellectual giftedness and personality or conduct disorders. Among its functions would be the collaboration in the elaboration of the census of students with special education needs, and in the assignment, control and utilization of the technical aids that are provided to the centres for a better educational intervention with these students. Also,

counselling of teachers and families in the utilization of the techniques, methods and resources appropriate for each disability and the elaboration of prevention and intervention plans in collaboration with other organs and institutions favouring socio-labour integration.

The objectives of the Educational and Psychopedagogical Guidance Teams make reference to the *Sector* as their broad context of action, and the *Centres*, as their more concrete sphere of activity. Among the Sector Objectives, according to Álvarez, Núñez, González-Castro and López (2003), we will cite the following:

- To facilitate the collaboration of Centres in the elaboration of a plan of action for the Sector and in the design of working programs.
- To be coordinated with the Teacher Centres and with the Inspection Services for the corresponding demarcation in the elaboration of the respective working plans and the resource map and Sector needs.
- To propose the activities of the different Teams (General, Early Assistance and Specific) in an integrated manner.
- To systematize the relationships between the Teams (General, Early Assistance and Specific) and the Head of the Guidance Departments at the Schools of reference.
- To prepare updated student files.
- To elaborate intervention programs.

On their part, in each Centre the Teams will try to:

- Carry out psychopedagogical assessments and report special education needs.
- Perform counselling tasks, especially within the Tutorial Action Plan, and in the work with students in programs of social skills, of improvement of self-esteem, of collaboration with families, etc.
- Collaborate with tutors and families trying to counsel them towards a better educational development of their children.
- Participate in the Plan to Attend Student Diversity (Plan de Atención a la Diversidad) in each centre. Facilitate an adapted response with reference to students with special education needs.
- Counsel the teaching staff, the Pedagogical Coordination Commission (Comisión de Coordinación Pedagógica) and all the organs of didactic coordination.
- To be coordinated with the Guidance Departments of Secondary Education Centres where students from the assigned Centres of primary education will go.

## GUIDANCE DEPARTMENTS

Guidance Departments are neither Clinical Psychology Consultants nor Secretaries for the Administration of Tests. Their tasks consist more in the dinamization and strengthening of the activities performed by tutors (form teacher) in order to ensure that Education Projects of Centres become a personalized reality for every student. In order for this to happen, the Guidance Department must perform its tasks in close coordination with tutors, cycle coordinators and teaching department managers. They all act under direct dependency of the Director of Studies and in close collaboration with the Management Team.

The need for Guidance Departments comes essentially from the existing numerous electives in Secondary Education and in Bachillerato (post-compulsory secondary education) as well as the diverse offer of Vocational Training Modules; in these cases, students need help when making decisions, when changing Cycles, Stages, Centres and when making the transition to working life. The Guidance Department will be composed of (Circular from the *Dirección General de Renovación Pedagógica*, July 27th 1993, providing instructions regarding the Guidance Department Activity Plan for Secondary Education Centres):

- Teachers specialized in psychology or pedagogy (responsible for the management of the Department).
- Area teachers, in the case of having Curricular Diversification Programs in the Centre (Socio-Linguistic and Scientific-Mathematical areas).
- Support teachers (Therapeutic Pedagogy, Audition and Language) for students with special education needs.
- Occupational training and guidance teachers (FOL).

The Royal Decree 83/1996, of January 26th, points out among the functions of the Guidance Department "the elaboration of the plan of activities and the end of course memorandum". Such elaboration is the responsibility of the Department Head whose functions are also promoting the assessment of the different projects and activities of the Guidance Department and to ensure adherence to the plan.

The Resolution of 29-4-1996 of the D.G.C.E. specifies more clearly these activities which have to do with the Academic and Vocational Guidance Plan, the Tutorial Action Plan, the support to the teaching-learning process and the attention to diversity.

In addition, the Guidance Department Activity Plan

should take into account the objective necessities detected in the Centre, as well as the “subjective” necessities perceived by the Staff, Management Team and the Pedagogical Coordination Commission (*Comisión de Coordinación Pedagógica*), and the available personal resources and material. Furthermore, it should plan ahead the actions and procedures regarding Programs of Curricular Diversification (programming, development, organization and coordination), and the Program for the Vocational Initiation. In this sense, the Resolution of 29-4-1996 about the Organization of the Guidance Department proposes as one of the competencies of the guidance counsellor “to counsel educational teams regarding the Programs of Vocational Initiation and in the elaboration of the corresponding programming as well as of the final Guidance Counsel.

These specific priorities, in conjunction with the more general ones, help us sum up the Sphere of Activity of the Guidance Department into three main points:

1. Counselling in the development of the Educational Project, Curricular Project and classroom programming.
2. Organization of the appropriate supports.
3. Design of the Programs of Group or Individual Adaptation and Tutorial Action.

Finally, the Guidance Department must establish links to other education, health-related or municipal area services. Therefore, it is essential to introduce into the Plan of Activities a section regarding coordination, specifically with Municipal Social Services in order to tackle absenteeism and coexistence problems.

Thus, there are a series of different functions depending on which is the target group of the Educational Community (González-Pienda, Álvarez, Fernández & González-Castro, 2003; Núñez & González-Pienda, 2006); these are: Centre, students, teachers, families and other institutions. Among the functions with relation to the Centre, we have:

- To collaborate in the elaboration of Educational and Curricular Projects, as well as in the design of the specific integration programs for teacher formation and projects for the innovation of education.
- To counsel the respective organs in relation to students with special education needs and with learning difficulties regarding matters such as curricular adaptations, curricular diversification and evaluation and promotion criteria.
- To participate in the study of student needs and the

possible response in order to meet them.

- To collaborate in the planning and organization of educational activities including extracurricular activities.
- To promote cooperation with parents in the educational programs of their children.
- To provide in coordination with the Sector Team, specialized psycho-pedagogical counselling whenever needed.
- To participate mainly in Compulsory Secondary Education, Bachillerato and in Vocational Training Cycles (middle and higher levels) with respect to Vocational Training, in all aspects relative to professional guidance and the preparation for working life, in permanent cooperation with the business world.

With students, it would be necessary to:

- Counsel them individually, both in the educational and vocational spheres.
- Counsel them in their decision-making process regarding changes in Cycle and Stages, choice of elective subjects, electivity and starting in active life.
- To facilitate them information about academic and professional opportunities.
- To intervene in the ACIs (Individual Curricular Adaptation) and in the Curricular Diversification Programs.
- To promote the implementation of strategies of methodological innovation.

With teachers, it is necessary to:

- Provide them information about student psychopedagogical variables.
- Counsel them about how to attend diversity.
- Help them in their performance of the tutorial function, especially with students with special education needs and with other behaviour or coexistence problems.
- Provide them with programs and activities regarding techniques for teaching how to think, learning strategies and study habits.
- Integrate them in the activities organized by the Guidance Department.
- Counsel them on the use of methods of group dynamics, interview, etc.
- Guide them in the implementation of innovations, both in the fields of methodology and evaluation.
- Offer them support in the detection of problems and deficiencies in development and learning, as well as in the adequate intervention for their solution.

We will point out the following functions in relation to families:

- Facilitate cooperation between teachers, tutors and parents in the detection and solution of educational problems.
- Instruct parents about their active role in their children's education.
- Ask for their collaboration in the activities organized by the Centre where their assistance can be of great help.
- Organize meetings to improve their formation in educational aspects of their direct responsibility.

Finally, there are also functions in relation to other institutions like for example:

- Coordinate the collaboration of the Centre with other surrounding institutions, essentially with respect to social insertion of students.
- Be in permanent contact with the interdisciplinary Sector Teams to obtain their guidance.
- Obtain help and information as well as to collaborate with the diverse sectors of the Administration of Education.

### OMISSIONS OF THE LOE ON GUIDANCE COUNSELLING MATTERS

- a) The LOE (Art. 1.f) eliminates psycho-pedagogical attention as one of the necessary principles for the achievement of a personalized formation that favours in every student an education that is complete in knowledge, skills and values. This principle was present in the LOGSE (Art. 2.3.g) in conjunction with the principle of educational and vocational counselling.
- b) The LOE (Art. 28) does not mention the Guidance Counsel that accompanied the Title of Compulsory Secondary Education (LOCE, Art. 31.3) and that was of a confidential nature but it was in no case prescriptive.
- c) The LOE also does not make any reference to Guidance Counselling in Bachillerato. In the LOGSE it did (Art. 27.2) when it talked about counselling with reference to the elective subjects and the subjects proper of modality, to guidance with respect to later studies or profession.
- d) The LOE (Chap. II, Title V), when talking about the autonomy of the Centres, does not mention the integration of the "Tutorial Action Plans" and the "Academic and Vocational Guidance Plan" in the

Educational Project of Centres, which was included in the LOCE (Art. 68.1).

- e) Finally, one of the most significant shortcomings of the LOE is the silencing of the existence of the Guidance Departments among the organs of teaching coordination. It only mentions the Didactic Coordination Departments and the Educational Teams.

### QUESTIONS FOR DEBATE

It is necessary to reflect on some questions since they will probably affect the further development of the Law. Among these we will highlight the following:

- What mechanisms of coordination should be established in the change of stage in order to facilitate the process of student formation? (LOE, Art. 2.5).
- What programs for the reinforcement of students with negative reports should be implemented in order to develop their basic competencies? (LOE, Art. 24.8).
- What attention plan should be designed for students with learning disabilities or with special education needs associated to a high or low intellectual capacity? (LOE, Art. 26.5).
- What specialists should provide the pertinent supports and with what means? (LOE, Art. 72.1).
- Should the repetition of a school year have a Report from the Guidance Counsellor? (LOE, Art. 28.2)
- Should there be a Guidance Counsel at the end of Compulsory Secondary Education? (LOE, Art. 28).
- Would it be good to facilitate programs of pre-diversification and not limit the start of diversification programs to the third year of Compulsory Secondary Education? (LOE, Art. 27.1).
- What professionals should perform the psychological, educational and professional guidance of students? (LOE, Art. 91).
- Which functions correspond to School Psychologists?
- Can other professionals of Pedagogy or Philosophy perform the functions of the School Psychologist?
- If there is no express mention to the Guidance Departments, could the guidance counselling task become diluted in other organs for teaching coordination or teaching teams without specialized formation? (LOE, Art. 130).

### FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The LOE proposes "educational and vocational counselling as a necessary means for the achievement of

a personalized formation that promotes an integral formation in knowledge, skills and values" (LOE, Art. 1). This integral formation should reach every student, therefore, "throughout Compulsory Secondary Education the attention to student diversity will be an essential principle that will be guaranteed" (LOE, Art. 4). In practice, for educational and vocational guidance and to attend student diversity there will be "specialized services of educational, psychopedagogical and vocational guidance" (LOE, Third Additional Provision). The role of these services, even though it was partly defined by the normative development of the Guidance Departments after LOGSE (OM of 29-04-92, RD120/1998 of April 23rd, OM of 27-07-98, among others), is still not very clear. Often, guidance counsellors do not have sufficient resources (time, complete interdisciplinary team, spaces, formation, etc.) to be able to tackle all the problems they are up against, even though it is said that "the Educational Administration will provide public and concerted Centres (publicly funded private centres) with all the resources so that students that need an educational approach that is different from the ordinary due to the presence of special education needs (high intellectual capacity, late incorporation in the education system or other personal or family circumstances) can reach the maximum development possible of their personal capabilities and, in all cases, the general objectives established for all students" (LOE, Arts. 68 y 69).

In this sense, every Guidance Department should have on their team, aside from the professionals for the provision of the pertinent supports, a School Psychologist for the diagnosis, intervention or appropriate derivation of those cases that present emotional, affective-motivational, behaviour or personality problems. This is important because many of the problems at present are more emotional than cognitive or conative. Thus, emotional education is going to be one of the great challenges of Guidance Counselling in the forthcoming years (Bisquerra, 2006).

In addition, the Guidance Department should be represented in the Educational Team of the Centre and intervene in evaluation meetings, in meetings of teaching staff, in the decisions that affect students with special education needs, in repetitions, changes of stage, in the electives and options, therefore, the necessity of its participation in the elaboration of the Projects of Centres, especially in the aspects relating to the inclusion of

ordinary and extraordinary measures for attending student diversity, in Classroom programming, in early detection of special education needs, in the implementation of the plans for educational reinforcement and support, in psychoeducational assessment, in socio-family attention and in the elaboration of support materials (Trillo, 2006).

For this, close collaboration between tutors and Guidance Departments is necessary, which should go beyond the mere professional advise. The School Psychologist, on many occasions, must centre his tasks more on individual counselling on special educational needs associated to cognitive, emotional, sensory, behavioural or social deficits, while the tutor will be the person with a more complete idea of the educational approach that is being exercised with each student. In addition, the tutor acts as a bridge between the rest of the teachers and the student and between the family and the Centre. For this reason, the figure of the tutor in Secondary Education is so crucial; however, many teachers feel reluctant to be tutors since they have not been adequately formed. Therefore, the School Psychologist's task will also be the formation of young tutors in the psychoeducational field, to be able to coordinate their functions and work in the same direction. On its part, the Administration should incentivate the tutorial and consider it in the school period in order to strengthen it not only with words but also with actions.

Now then, the importance of guidance counselling is not only limited to Secondary Education Centres but it is also important for Preschool and primary Education Centres. The Guidance Units for preschool and Primary Education Centres should be inseparable, at a functional and organizational level, from the Guidance Departments at the Secondary Education Centres that they have been assigned (Ojea, 2006). In this way, a globalizing guidance model is proposed, with intervention phases which are organized according to these three levels:

1. **Tutorial:** Tutorial Action Plan with the assessment of the corresponding Guidance Units and Departments.
2. **Guidance Units and Departments:** Educational Guidance Plan following the guidelines of the Pedagogical Coordination Commission (*Comisión de Coordinación Pedagógica*) of each Centre.
3. **Sector Teams:** Sectorial Coordination Plan for assessment, formation and exchange of information of Guidance Units and Departments of the assigned Centres.



The organization and functioning of this triple guidance action could follow these steps:

1. The assigned Centres will unite the action measures at the beginning of the school year. The Sector Teams will coordinate these actions.
2. Follow-up will be performed once every trimester. The Guidance Units of the assigned Centres, the Guidance Departments of reference and the Sector Teams will be present.
3. There will be monthly coordination meetings between tutors and the corresponding Guidance Units or Departments.

This way, guidance counselling could become a dinamizing element of the teaching-learning process, with the aim of improving the efficacy of Centres.

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