

COUNSELORS' EDUCATION IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO LATIN AMERICA

Mirta Gavilán

*Phd. Psychology. Full Profesor, Psychology School. La Plata National University.
mirtagavilan@fibertel.com.ar
postgrado@psico.unlp.edu.ar*

Abstract

This paper makes reference to the importance lying, at present, on the professional education of counselors. It goes through the history of the different pre-scientific and scientific stages of counseling, and it points out the main representatives in Latin America. It also shows the current state of the specialization, taking as an antecedent some in-depth, widely encompassing research carried out in the European Union in this area. Coincidences and differences are exposed here in terms of professional profiles, university degrees, institutional dependence, updating processes and modes of intervention. The current state of postgraduate studies at university is also touched upon, and the different proposals for further education in Latin America are analyzed as well as their dependence upon an undergraduate degree in Psychology, Educational Sciences or Psycho-pedagogy. Finally, this paper places counseling within the complexity and the need to provide all-encompassing and integrative answers which require a wide and deep enough education so as to answer all these issues and problems.

Key Words: education; postgraduate; counseling; complexity.

Introduction

It is undeniable that counselors' education in Latin America has been influenced by the United States and Europe, and in order to analyze its origin we need to look into the history of counseling itself and how the different prevailing paradigms have pervaded education and training.

This is a profession which has gone through changes and dis-articulations and which has had various marks or imprints through history. It was tightly connected with the world of work during the first part of the so-called Scientific stage of counseling – from the 20th Century -, but its object of study and professional practice then moved almost exclusively to the formal educational system. Various professionals, experts and laymen with certain training started to take part in the different counseling instances and practices.

To contextualize our work, we are going to take into account some historical milestones in counseling in Latin America and then we will briefly describe counselors' education in the EU through the CEDEFOP and Dr Anthony Watts' report.

Finally, we will take up the issue of counseling in complexity, a concept put forward by Edgar Morin, which encompasses both the need for a redefinition of counseling and its present lines of work.

Historical antecedents of counseling in Latin America

To think about the origins of Professional Counseling means to go back to the History of Humanity. Different authors and researchers in this subject provide different interpretations, but most of them refer to two moments or stages: the first is called Informal or Pre-Scientific, and it spans from the origins of humanity to the end of the 19th Century or the beginning of the 20th Century. The second stage, Formal or Scientific, starts in the 20th Century and lasts up to the present, and - in term - includes other sub-stages.

During the first stage called Pre-Scientific or Informal, the development of Professional Counseling in Latin America had different emergence characteristics from the other continents, due to the historical situations which marked its birth. Moreover, in this part of the hemisphere, the choice of profession was marked by social standing and regional culture as well.

The Industrial Revolution and the two World Wars had a huge impact on Latin America, since the countries profited from what the United States and Europe lacked, which opened possibilities for the export of goods. From this change on, people started to think about training human resources for the working world. The forerunner country in the subject of industrialization was Brazil, therefore Professional Counseling was given a great amount of importance there, especially by Professor Emilio Mira y Lopez, who created the most complete Institute of Professional Selection and Counseling in the continent in Rio in 1947.

It must also be noticed, though, that what greatly influenced Professional Counseling and its new interventions in Latin America was the creation of courses of studies in Psychology. As observed by Ruben Ardilla (1986), at the beginning, the paradigm of differential psychology prevailed. The first stages of the Latin American Professional Counseling were completely linked with work and aimed at a model for professional selection. And, although Counseling has had different developments in Latin America, the existence of basically two main trends must be pointed out: one led by Mira y López, up to the seventies, and the other led by Rodolfo Bohoaslavsky (Argentina), of psycho-analytic orientation, which still prevails in some Latin American countries like Brazil.

In Ardilla's opinion, from the beginning of the 1950s, when the course of studies in Psychology was generally created in the region, we can talk about a second industrial

revolution in Latin America and, as a consequence, a centering around organizations, rather than around individuals and their skills or abilities. There was a centering around human resources understood as assets, as well as around motivated work as productivity guarantee. In this sense, and casting aside the wide class differences which characterizes Brazil, this country has been a battering ram of capitalist industrialization and the initiator of professional counseling.

F. Seminerio (1978) was one of the historians and pioneers in the specialization, followed by the already mentioned multifaceted Mira y López, founder of the most complete Institute of Professional Selection and Counseling in the continent. Mira y López (Santiago de Cuba 1896 – Brazil 1964), who had been chief of the Psychophysiology Laboratory at the Institute of Selection and Counseling in Barcelona in 1919, created the Institute of Selection and Counseling in Rio de Janeiro in 1947 and in 1948 he organized the first Latin American training course for counselors and psychotechnicians, with strong repercussions in the unconscious.

Another milestone when it comes to Counseling in Latin America was the creation of the Office of Professional Counseling of the Province of Buenos Aires, in Argentina, in 1949. This office gathered twelve university-degree holding teachers from various disciplines – Philosophy, Pedagogy, Educational Sciences, Spanish, and so on – and, especially, three important specialists in psycho-diagnosis, psychometrics and vocational studies: Dr. Bernardo Serebrinsky, Dr. Nicolás Tavella and Dr. Jaime Bernstein, who were in charge of training and supervising those first twelve counselors. These acted, later on, as multiplying trainers in the different experiences of Counseling in the province of Buenos Aires.

Ardilla also remembers that Brazilian psychologists were the first to obtain legal recognition for their profession (1962). They took hold of the intellectual and institutional inheritance from Mira y López, and above all from the Brazilian Association of Applied Psychology. He mentions the importance that state organisms grant to counseling – whether this be academic, vocational-occupational, professional or personal -, which can be seen in important publications such as *Educational and Professional Counseling* in Chile, Guatemala, Panama and Venezuela (1967) by the OEA and in events like the Latin American Counseling Congress, whose memoirs were published by the International Counseling Association in 1971.

The current estate of counselors

The various Counseling beginnings, methodologies and practices in Europe led the CEDEFOP (European Center for the Development of Professional Education) to ask Dr. Anthony Watts to coordinate some research in the EU on the different professional

profiles of community counselors. From the findings listed in Dr Watt's reports it can be seen that the estates of the European Economic Union bear great differences in their education and levels of intervention.

As a result of this research and for didactic purposes, it was established that counseling professionals and services can be grouped according to three viewpoints: location, approach and financing, as shown in the chart below:

a) Location	b) Approach	c) Financing
1) Formal Education System. 2) Governmental and non-governmental independent Organisms which support Educational Institutions and the world of work and those who have abandoned the educational system. 3) Employment system.	1) Pedagogical Orientation 2) Professional Orientation 3) Personal y social orientation	1) Central administration. 2) Regional organisms. 3) Local organisms. 4) Unemployment insurance 5) Private institutions.

Moreover, Counseling professions are many and they vary according to the country and the complexity of the task at hand. This can be summarized in hierarchical order as follows:

1. *Counseling Counselor*
2. *Counseling Professor*
3. *Counseling Psychologist*
4. *Work Insertor*
5. *Informant*

They all differ in terms of education. Most EU countries place importance in the training of Professional Counselors. For the first three levels, Counseling Counselor, Counseling Professor and Counseling Psychologist, a university degree in Psychology or Psycho-Pedagogy is required, as well as a postgraduate degree in Counseling lasting from six months to three years (for instance, in France). For the other two, Work Insertor and Informant, a four or five-year university degree is needed as well as prior experience and/or on-site training.

The Counseling specialization programs require different areas of knowledge: Counseling, Psychology, Education, Sociology, Economy, Law and Statistics.

Taking all this into account and the work carried out in Canada by Stuart Conger and Bryan Hebbert, we will research at the University of La Plata, Argentina, the knowledge, coverage state, intervention level, education, methodologies and practices

in Occupational – Vocational Counseling at the different organisms in the area of La Plata and its surroundings. We will include here the different axis in which these counseling practices are performed: Health, Education, Work and Political Sciences.

Our research, which lasted three years, gave rise to the construction of different profiles in terms of education, degrees, postgraduate training, on-site training, human resources and materials, levels of intervention in professional practice, institutional dependence, types of services, access levels, activities and economic retribution, in each of the aforementioned systems. We also observed in all of them great diversity, dis-articulation and lack of training. This research was turned into a book: *Interdisciplinary field and Counseling* by Gavilán, M.; Quiles, T; and Chá, T (2003).

Current education of Counselors in Latin America

The postgraduate degrees usually offered by academic institutions are Specialization, Masters and Doctorate. The first one aims at obtaining in-depth knowledge of a specific subject or area within a profession or the application field of several professions, widening professional training through intensive training. It has an integrative final evaluation and leads to the degree of Specialist in a certain profession or field of application.

The Masters degree, on the other hand, grants higher education in a discipline or area, providing in-depth theoretical, technological and professional knowledge in order to conduct research in that field. It entails the production of an individual work, project, paper or thesis under the supervision of a director, and a final evaluation by a board including at least one member not affiliated to the university in question. This final work, paper, project or thesis must prove dexterity in the handling of concepts and methodologies corresponding to the current state of knowledge in the discipline(s) in which this is done. The result is the granting of the academic degree of Masters, with a precise specification in a discipline or interdisciplinary area.

The Doctorate aims at obtaining real original findings in an area of knowledge, demonstrating universal academic excellence. This original contribution must be expressed in an individual Doctorate Thesis carried out under the supervision of a thesis director, and evaluated by a board consisting mostly of - or in some cases of at least one - members external to the program. The result is the granting of the academic degree of Doctor.

Although each of these educational instances may differ in certain aspects as regards the human resources and institutional experiences of all Latin American universities, there are coincidences in their general aspects. The biggest differences are found when it comes to Masters degrees, which can also be seen in European

universities, which have more experience in postgraduate education. Some schools or universities have a more professional axis; they are oriented more to professionalization than to research.

There are other training forms called Professional Assistantships and On-Site Training. The first is a training and practice tool which articulates instances of learning and work, enabling the acquisition of a wide spectrum of professional skills. The second refers to training activities generated within the institutions where professional practices are performed and developed for their human resources. This can be carried out by their own technical-professional resources with higher levels of training or through agreements with other learning institutions such as universities, associations or private institutions, professional associations, etc. These forms of training are not regulated like the aforementioned academic instances. They are usually performed according to the needs of the institution, for up-dating reasons or as processes of work renewal, and they are very much connected with the needs of up-scaling technicians-professionals within an institution. Now we will mention some offers of postgraduate education in Counseling which can be taken at different institutions in Latin America.

In Brazil, there are various specializations in Counseling. In Puerto Alegre, the ABOP (Brazilian Association of Professional Counseling) offers the Specialization as a 360-hour postgraduate degree as well as the Specialization in Clinic Psychology and Professional Counseling, which is a 540-hour degree exclusively for psychologists. In Belo Horizonte, at the School of Estacio Desa, there is a Specialization in Professional and Vocational Counseling, with an interdisciplinary emphasis, for those graduates from all disciplines who do professional or vocational counseling or personnel location, or who wish to work in this field. This course is oriented towards organizational and educational psychology.

In Uruguay, activities related with training in Counseling started at the Counseling Center "Clemente Stabile" in 1990; and later on the School of Psychology of the University of the Republic began to offer postgraduate courses in Psychology.

In Venezuela, where education is quite influential upon counseling, specialization courses and Masters degrees are offered at the Schools of Humanities and Education. The School of Education, at the Central University of Venezuela, offers two postgraduate steams: a Specialization in Counseling and a Masters in Counseling. The former is more connected to professionalization, while the latter emphasizes a special interest in research on the educational side of Counseling.

At the School of Education from the University of Carabobo, in the Postgraduate Office, there is a Masters degree in Education oriented towards Counseling and Advice.

At the School of Humanities and Education of the University of Zulia, in Maracaibo, within the Postgraduate area, two Masters degrees are offered: one in Counseling with an orientation towards Education and the other with an orientation towards Work. The degrees granted are Masters in Counseling oriented towards Education and Masters oriented towards Work Counseling.

At the Catholic University of Chile and belonging to the School of Education, there is a Specialization in Educational and Vocational Counseling, which cannot be continued either through a Masters or through a Doctorate degree.

In Argentina, greatly influenced by the undergraduate course of study in Psychology and by the postgraduate courses in Counseling, we find these postgraduate offers:

1. At the University of Buenos Aires, in the School of Psychology and as part of the Masters in Educational Psychology, the following is one within three possible orientations: Specialization in Vocational Counseling in educational and work contexts, coordinated by the Vocational – Occupational Counseling chair in the course of studies in Psychology.

2. At the University of Tres de Febrero, as part of the Masters in Educational Policies and Administration, there is a Specialization in Vocational and Educational Counseling, oriented towards the educational system and with a projection to community environments. Even though this School does not offer Psychology as an undergraduate course of Studies, the members of the Association of Counselors of the Republic of Argentina come from the area of Psychology and the Specialization is coordinated and taught by graduates in Psychology.

3. At the National University of La Plata, in the course of study in Psychology, we have organized an interdisciplinary course of studies which specializes in Counseling aiming at an integral approach in counseling within the different fields on which it has to act: Education - Work - Health – Social. Policies, and in different levels of intervention: individual, group, institutional and community. This course has nine obligatory and two optional seminars. These two can be selected from various courses offered by our institution or other institutions in the country. After the obligatory seminars, the graduates perform professional practices in institutional, community and private areas. Once the professionals have fulfilled the Specialization requirements, may opt to go on with the Doctorate in Psychology.

The proposals mentioned above are synthesized in the chart below.

COUNTRY	UNIVERSITY	SCHOOL	DEGREE GRANTED
VENEZUELA	Central	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialization on Counseling • Masters in Education oriented to Counseling
	Carabobo	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters in Education oriented to Counseling
	Zulia	Humanities and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters in Counseling • Masters in Work Counseling
URUGUAY	De la República	Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling courses for graduates
CHILE	Católica	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialization in Educational and Work Counseling
BRASIL	Brazilian Association of Professional Counseling (ABOP) Porto Alegre		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialization in Vocational Counselling
	Belo Horizonte Estacio Desa		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialization in Vocational and Course of Studies Counseling
ARGENTINA	Buenos Aires	Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters in Educational Psychology (specialization: Vocational Counseling)
	Tres de Febrero	Argentine Counseling Association (APORA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters in Educational Policies and Administration (specialization: Vocational and Educational Counseling)
	La Plata	Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialization in Counseling within individual, institutional and community contexts.

Counseling within complexity

Today's transformations in society, with such significant differences within world, national, regional and local contexts, and particularly specialists in these topics and in problems including such complex issues as the so-called current psycho-social problems (poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, work instability, teenage pregnancies, multiculturalism and subjects with different abilities) must look at counseling from a macro-perspective.

Nowadays the counseling problem demands a re-conceptualization as an inter-transdisciplinary problem, where theory focuses on the structural nodes of its complex relationships, and where empirical research and counseling interventions find the situations in which proof is established through experience and enriched by adequate and effective counseling.

For this approach, we have taken as our theoretical framework the concept of complexity put forward by Edgar Morin, who considers Hegel, Marx, G. Bachelard and Lukas the philosophical antecedents of his theory and who are his main referents of the complexity theory.

Art, literature and ecological vision are the main references in the construction of complex thought. This theory goes against classical knowledge theories, which normally take into account the achievement of certainty, the exact, the measurable, the comparable, and frames that Morin considers the organized recursivity principle, where cause and effect are intertwined, mutually recreate themselves and the effect acts back on the cause originating different circular courses. The hologrammatical principle establishes that not only a whole is more than the sum of its parts, but also that within each part there is a whole and this causes a multiplying part – whole relationship.

The school is, at present, one of the institutions which massively faces a great number of adversities derived from the processes of social exclusion and des -affiliation.

The growing worsening of children and teenagers' living conditions who are every day affected by an excluding model, places the school – in some cases – on the boundaries of its specific possibilities and the children, on the limits of their capabilities to think the future and, within this framework, to have a personal project.

If an imaginary “line of fire” was drawn where multiple problems ailing society as a whole these days – derived both from the socio-economic system, with its consecutive readjustments and therefore deepening of misery and poverty, and from the political system and its great discredit - cross in all directions, the generation of violent situations manifested in public and private spaces and reproduced in the classrooms and other educational buildings could be observed. When there is exclusion, trouble to accept the norms and directives inevitably arises and family problems such as disintegration, abandonment, alcoholism and abuse, among others, become evident.

All these conflicts are transferred to school, which has to increasingly bear the burden of these kinds of situations. Its specific function begins to alter and, in many cases, teachers and counseling teams are at a loss about what to do with this or which tools to work with.

It is important to point out here that, in general, within the processes of professionalization of those who work in the educational areas, the stimulating expressions of “social vulnerability” or “exclusion” which emerge from a present unavoidable vitality are neither seen as epistemological categories nor as analytical instances of the professional practices.

At the beginning of the new millenium, economic globalization, technological advances and highly competitive jobs demand certain education to individuals so as to develop

skills which may allow them to carry out several tasks of certain complexity. This is why articulation between education, training and the world of work becomes truly significant, since the possibility to build a personal project will mostly depend upon it. Formal education and training institutions attempt, as a result, to meet these requirements, and this is what the documents of implemented transformation put forward these days.

Nonetheless, there exists an abyss between intentions and concrete reality, particularly that which can be observed in education institutions with a population in increasing process of “social exclusion”. In developing countries, such as those in Latin America, the problem of the quality of education is serious, in spite of the change in the legislation of educational systems and the attempts to improve the quality of education. Although compulsory schooling has been extended and wide sections of society can remain and complete their elementary – and even sometimes their secondary – education, the learning conditions and its results vary greatly according to the students’ region and socio-economic origin.

In fact, children from poor homes who manage to remain within the formal educational system have access, in most cases, to peripheral and / or urban schools in which the degrees, though similar to those granted by more prestigious schools, do not imply equal learning levels. Many times secondary schools with vulnerable populations, when at risk that these young people drop out of the system, implement retention mechanisms of different kinds (scholarships, lowering school demands, flexible absences, etc). These “fictionally retained” groups are very often excluded from the productive system because they have not acquired the necessary skills and have received a degree devoid of content.

Although these students have finished their secondary education, they are neither qualified for higher education nor to insert themselves in any productive level, because they do not know their own skills and abilities, and because the system has not given them the necessary education or the means to look for their first job, which is even worse in the current state of structural and, specifically, juvenile unemployment. We must remember that, when unemployment is structural, professional education is not the main variable to attack it. Rather, it is a form of adaptation to the changes experimented by society and a contribution to the improvement of the necessary skills to obtain work.

Some references and research in Latin America show that school counseling teams which traditionally carried out vocational occupational work, among other kinds of work, are overwhelmed by issues associated with critical family conditions, such as violence, abandonment, economic problems, addictions, etc. This means that very little time is left to develop activities specific to the so-called “vocational occupational counseling”.

The social demand upon the school has become greater and greater and, at present, lots of community's expectations and needs are placed on these institutions. Therefore, when confronted with these complex situations, Counseling needs to be seen differently. It needs to be considered from an integrative model of prevention which implies the intervention of a group of institutional e inter-institutional strategies.

Nowadays we understand prevention as the capacity that human beings and their social groups possess to anticipate, through various strategies, situations which might be harmful in any ways. (Gavilán 2006)

The complexity of counseling activities, the theories behind them, the changes in educational and work systems, and the new psycho-social problems associated to unemployment (re-conversion, adequacy, retirement preparation), have given rise to a re-dimensioning of the counseling strategies and the many counseling centers and services around the world.

All these social changes have started to alter and widen the counselor's view, even beyond formal and informal educational systems, so as to encompass some community projection programs and the attention to economic, labor, technological and socio-cultural systems. Counseling is a complex praxis which connects both theory and the different activities that have to be carried out in the various areas of social life. It also needs constant research in order to understand the concrete reality, as well as the best methodological tools and techniques to use. That is to say, the complex situations in which counselors find themselves prove the need to widen counseling fields at all times and places and, therefore, the education and training of counselors as well.

The International Counseling Association proposes sets of competence developed in two levels: central competence, closely connected with the counselor's ethics, and specialized competence, related to the different areas in which counseling is included: diagnosis – educational counseling – career development – counseling – information – consult – research – programs and service management - community and employment development.

The different Latin American realities in complex contexts lead us to think or re-think the education of counselors. This should lead to an inter-trans-discipline. Moreover, its objective should be the widening of disciplinary knowledge, such as anthropology, sociology, politics, economy and education, as well as research, work, planning and programming in the different areas and levels which require counseling interventions, evaluation, community intervention and, above all, the various contents that Counseling borrows from psychological and psycho-pedagogical disciplines in terms of postgraduate education.

According to the description of the different educational offers mentioned, we can see that we are going in such direction. However, we still have to go much deeper, since counseling must provide an integrative answer to all subjects who - at different points in their lives – need to make new choices. It must remain within the framework of diversity.

At last, we hope that on these days of academic production and social interaction, there is a development of educational and training models in our discipline, in accordance with the existing human resources and with the similar – and at the same time different – realities that we share in Latin America.

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