

## SCHOOL COUNSELORS: IMPORTANCE OF THE PERSONAL AND PARTICIPATORY DIMENSION IN ATTITUDINAL COMPETENCES

### ORIENTADORES ESCOLARES: IMPORTANCIA DE LA DIMENSIÓN PERSONAL Y PARTICIPATIVA EN LAS COMPETENCIAS ACTITUDINALES

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#### ABSTRACT

*Introduction:* The current model of indirect intervention about educational guidance, based on collaborative consultation and theoretically grounded in the principles of prevention, intervention and social development, is an unquestionable quality factor in education systems. *Method:* The aim of this study is to understand the degree of importance that attitudinal competences hold for an effective performance by school counselors in Education Schools of Galicia. In order to measure attitudinal competences it was used the questionnaire Analysis of professional competences of school counselors. *Results:* The results of the investigation confirm that counselors consider attitudinal competences very important (69.1%), those with the highest rating (percentages over 75%) are those referring to “knowing how to act” (participative dimension) in contrast to a worse assessment (percentages under 55%) of those referring to “knowing how to be” (personal dimension). Principal components analysis followed by varimax rotation indicated two factors jointly

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accounting for 61.2% of total variance, one associated with actions involving modification of syllabuses, and the other with actions not requiring such changes. Cronbach's alphas were .94 and .80 for the two factors. Finally, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) holds that hypothesized model appears to be an acceptable fit of data. *Conclusions:* This study, beyond lending production of knowledge to the field of educational and vocational guidance, is a headway to favor the acquisition of attitudinal competences in counseling training, contributing to the strengthening of counseling services in terms of quality and excellence.

**Key Words:** Attitudinal competences, school counselors, educational guidance, professional development, training.

## RESUMEN

*Introducción:* El modelo actual de intervención indirecta de la orientación educativa, basado en la consulta colaborativa y fundamentado teóricamente en los principios de prevención, desarrollo e intervención social, constituye un factor de calidad indiscutible en los sistemas educativos. *Método:* El objetivo de este estudio conocer el grado de importancia de las competencias actitudinales en el desempeño eficaz de las funciones de los orientadores escolares en los centros educativos de Galicia. Para medir las competencias actitudinales se aplicó el cuestionario *Análisis de las competencias profesionales de los orientadores escolares*. *Resultados:* Los resultados de la investigación confirman que los orientadores consideran muy importantes las competencias actitudinales (69.1%), siendo mejor valoradas (porcentajes superiores al 75%) las que hacen referencia al “saber estar” (dimensión participativa) frente a una peor valoración (porcentajes por debajo del 55%) de las referidas al “saber ser” (dimensión personal). El análisis factorial a través de los componentes principales con rotación varimax configura dos factores que explican el 61.2% de la varianza de los datos, asociado uno con acciones que implican modificación de programas, y otro con acciones que no requieren tales cambios. Las alphas de Cronbach son de .94 y .80 para los dos factores. Finalmente, el análisis factorial confirmatorio (AFC) sostiene que el modelo hipotetizado tiene un aceptable ajuste a los datos. *Conclusiones:* El presente estudio, más allá de contribuir con la producción de conocimientos en el área de la orientación educativa y profesional, es un avance para favorecer la adquisición de competencias actitudinales en la formación orientadora, contribuyendo al fortalecimiento de los servicios de orientación en términos de calidad y excelencia.

**Palabras clave:** Competencias actitudinales, orientadores escolares, orientación educativa, desarrollo profesional, formación.

## Introduction

The Spanish Educational system, more specifically Compulsory Secondary Education, consider school and vocational counseling a continuous process aimed at a person's comprehensive education (Janson, Stone & Clark, 2009) that frames its activity in the process of the individual's development leading him/her to become a “person”. The constant changes in which our society is immersed make necessary the existence of some specialized guidance services (Reid & Ford, 2008), in permanent evolution (Álvarez & Bisquerra, 2008), moving the counseling intervention from mainly remedial (therapeutic) assistance models, towards others based on advising (program based intervention models). The international scene upholds the establishment

of certain necessary competences for the vocational and educational counselor which could allow the exchange of properly qualified professionals between all countries (Le Boterf, 2011; Repetto, Manzano, Ferrer-Sama & Hiebert, 2008; Schiersmann et al. 2012).

In this historical progress, the development of Educational Counseling has undergone continuous changes (Wagman, 1979), as sociocultural, economic and political state of affairs shaped the scene or real context in the field of education. An exhaustive analysis of the most notable research (Bisquerra, 1996; Repetto, Ballesteros & Malik, 1999; Sobrado, 2004; Vélaz de Medrano et al., 2001) about the duties and competences of school counselors, enables us to appreciate how until 1970 their main roles and duties were centered exclusively on clinical models, mostly therapeutic and reactive through which the direct and individualized intervention (Counseling) tried to satisfy the individual's necessities of a personal, educational and socio-professional kind. After 1970 their professional roles start to develop in order to adapt themselves to the new needs (Hardest & Dillard, 1994), emerging consulting models (firstly, with an indirect intervention approach exclusively, and at the beginning of 1990, conceived in a collaborative way) and more recently, with the appearance of program-based models (mainly proactive and in which the principles of prevention, development and social intervention play an important role).

Currently, counselors' training approach is characterized by the development of competences (Repetto, Malik & Ballesteros, 1998; Rosen, 1968; Sultana, 2009, Velaz de Medrano, Manzanares, López-Martín & Manzano-Soto, 2013) considered an indicator of their professionalism which comprise three ways of knowledge: theoretical knowledge (intellectual skills), practical knowledge (abilities and skills) and understanding how to be/act (attitudes). From this perspective, the counselor must adopt a holistic approach to methods of support and mutual collaboration (Blankstein, Houston & Cole, 2008) with all professionals in the educational community. Subsequently projects have started to emerge meant to design and validate scales with the purpose of finding out the basic aspects needed for the counselors' competences credentials (DiPerna & Elliot, 1999; Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera & Ramos, 2004). This way differences started to be set, between basic or core competences (professional behavior, interpersonal competence, knowledge of the progress of the career and evaluation of needs) and specialization competences (evaluation, school guidance, progress of the career, advising, information control, consultation and coordination, investigation and evaluation, management of programs and services, development of the capacity to interact with the community, and employment).

Under these guidelines, educational and vocational guidance is a students' right and a quality factor that educational administrations must guarantee (House & Hayes, 2002; Johnson, Rochkind & Ott, 2010), becoming a specialized instrument for supporting schools (Coll & Freeman, 1997; Lambie & Williamson, 2004), so they enable every student to fully benefit from the curriculum. Therefore it is necessary, at this period of change and modernization of teaching, that counseling gives satisfactory responses to the demands of families, school and community, from an organizational model with three convergent operating levels in constant and close collaboration and coordination: the mentor teacher (classroom) and the Counseling Department (center), at an internal level and the Counseling Teams (sectoral, provincial areas), at an external level. Consequently and with the European establishment of educational plans based on competences, it has raised the need of introducing them in the daily work of school counselors.

Then, the fact of designing the basic learning in terms of competences, emphasizes the importance of considering knowledge into action and not just as a representation (Pérez, 2007). This takes us to the aim of the study: to know the importance of the attitudinal competences in the performance of the orientation work in educational centers.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample was constituted by 258 counselors (41.6% of the whole population) from Primary and Secondary Education Centers of Galicia (Spain). In it, it is noticeable a slight predominance of women (57.6%) over men (41.5%). Moreover, it is remarked that most counselors' ages range between 35 and 45 years old (32.4%), with a professional experience from 6 to 10 years (41.5%).

### *Instrument and measures*

A questionnaire devised by the authors was used to obtain information about the different descriptive variables in the sample: personal and professional details (5 items), school details (3 items). In order to measure attitudinal competences it was used a piece of the questionnaire called "Analysis of professional competences of schools counselors" (Barreira, 2003). This study contains 16 items that analyze the attitudes of knowing how to be and how to act. Each item is valued on a Likert-sort scale that ranges between 1: nothing, and 5: a lot.

The validity of the content of the questionnaire, achieved by means of a laborious process of consultation to experts on educational and vocational guidance (Delphi technique), shows a high level of reliability ( $\alpha = .98$ ), rated by the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, that allows us to set on consistent and solid enough conclusions of the empirical investigation.

### *Procedure*

In the process of data collection, mail was sent to every counselor in Education, avoiding that way a bias due to the surveyor's presence and granting a greater attention, privacy, calmness and anonymity. The mail sent encloses a presentation letter, the questionnaire and a stamped envelope to send back once filled in. It is also set an approximate closing date of return, in view of the lengthy time it takes to gather the data.

### *Statistically analysis*

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0, using descriptive techniques for the analysis of the items. Principal components analysis was performed following verification of sampling adequacy and non-sphericity by means of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett tests, and was followed by varimax rotation. To make the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used Amos 20.0. To evaluate the fit of the model was used multiple indicators: Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), Ratio of Chi-square over Degrees of Freedom ( $\chi^2/df$ ), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), the coefficient of Tucker-Lewis (TLI), Root Mean Square Residual (RMR), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Critical Ratio (CR) and the correlation coefficients.

## Results

### Descriptive Analysis

Among the attitudinal competences of greater importance for counselors, the following stand out: “to know how to negotiate and mediate”, the “action according to ethical principles”, “to know how to transmit support and power”, “active and responsible work”, “to give authentic and sincere information”, “to have an appropriate tolerance”, “to communicate effectively and with empathy” and “to be an agent of prevention, talent and change”, all of them with appraisals of over 70% of response. As attitudes considered of lower importance (appraisals under 55%) stand out a “critical and reflective attitude”, “authenticity and coherence”, and “to face problems in an autonomous and creative manner” (table 1). From the collected data, it is concluded that participative attitudinal competences (*knowing how to act*, 73.9%) are better valued than personal ones (*knowing how to be*, 54.3%) by school counselors.

**TABLE 1. Attitudinal competences of school counselors**

ITEMS	Small (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)	M (MT= 3.84)	Sd
1. Critical and reflective attitude	28.0	33.9	38.1	4.13	.82
2. Active and responsible work	9.3	15.3	75.4	3.91	.84
3. Involvement, openness and flexibility	7.6	33.9	58.5	3.82	.98
4. Authenticity and coherence	9.3	36.4	52.5	3.80	.87
5. To face problems in an autonomous and creative manner	7.6	37.4	54.9	3.91	.96
6. To have an appropriate tolerance	5.9	19.5	74.6	3.18	.98
7. To respect individual, social and gender differences.	6.7	28.0	63.6	4.20	.86
8. To communicate effectively and with empathy	5.0	21.2	73.8	3.92	.84
9. To know how to negotiate and mediate	3.4	13.6	82.2	4.02	.95
10. Agent of prevention, talent and change	5.0	22.0	72.9	4.04	.84
11. To know how to transmit support and power (empowerment)	5.1	17.8	77.1	3.99	.89
12. To keep emotional balance and control	6.8	24.6	67.8	4.04	.93
13. Action according to necessary ethical principles	4.2	14.4	81.3	3.69	.89
14. To give authentic and sincere information	2.5	22.0	75.4	3.52	.95
15. Leadership ability, capacity for connection and team work	10.2	22.9	66.9	3.73	.88
16. Favor a collaborative behavior	7.6	22.9	69.5	3.61	.81

Also, data of the means (M<sub>T</sub>= 3.84) indicate items I<sub>1</sub> (M= 4.13), I<sub>2</sub> (M= 3.91), I<sub>5</sub> (M= 3.91), I<sub>7</sub> (M= 4.20), I<sub>8</sub> (M= 3.92), I<sub>9</sub> (M= 4.02), I<sub>10</sub> (M= 4.04), I<sub>11</sub> (M= 3.99), I<sub>12</sub> (M= 4.04) concerning interpersonal skills of counselors are above, while the items more related social competence I<sub>3</sub> (M= 3.82), I<sub>4</sub> (M= 3.80), I<sub>6</sub> (M= 3.18), I<sub>13</sub> (M= 3.69), I<sub>14</sub> (M= 3.52), I<sub>15</sub> (M= 3.73), I<sub>16</sub> (M= 3.61), are below.

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic KMO had a value of .92 (p<.01), which satisfies the usual requirement, KMO > .8. The Bartlett test was  $\chi^2 = 1265.17$  (p < .001), indicating the possibility of factor extraction. Principal components analysis in fact identified two factors with eigenvalues greater than unity, which jointly accounted for 61.2% of the total variance. Following rotation (table 2), factor 1 (eigenvalue 6.18) comprised items 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, corresponding to

the participative attitudinal competency “knowing how to act” ( $\alpha = .94$ ); while factor 2 (eigenvalue 3.61), which was defined by items 1, 3, 4, 5, 12, are identified with personal attitudinal competency “knowing how to be” ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

**TABLE 2. Factor loadings following varimax rotation\***

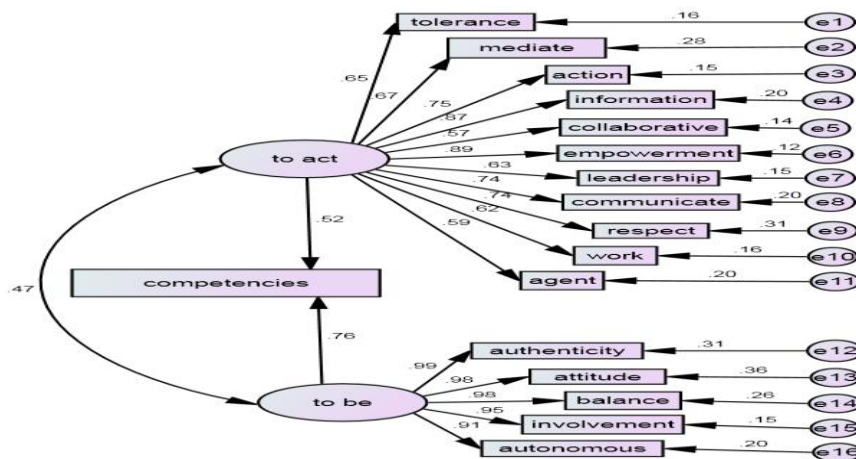
Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	h2
6	.81		.53
9	.76		.65
13	.75		.61
14	.72		.73
16	.71	TO ACT	.36
11	.70		.69
15	.69		.56
8	.68		.65
7	.68		.62
2	.65		.66
10	.60		.72
4		.84	.61
1		.71	.64
12	TO BE	.62	.60
3		.59	.58
5		.48	.56
<b>Eigenvalue</b>	6.18	3.61	%
<b>% Variant explained</b>	<b>38.62</b>	<b>22.56</b>	Accumulated Variance 61.18

\*Only loadings > .40 are shown

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Once obtaining the results of previous exploratory studies, it is hypothesized a two-factor structure as the best solution of the “Attitudinal competences of counselors” questionnaire. However, it conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of the items to ratify the model obtained in the exploratory. The figure 1 presents the confirmatory factor analysis performed with Amos 20.0.

**FIGURE 1. Results for the structural model**



So, the fit indexes of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), indicate an acceptable fit [ $\chi^2(103) = 190.182$ ,  $p = .06$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.846$ ; CFI = .912; TLI = .904; GFI = .908; AGFI = .901; RMR = .017; RMSA = .057] between the model and the observed data. So, the analysis of the overall goodness of fit of the researcher clearly leans towards the decision to accept the model.

As regards the fitness of individual parameter estimates (table 3), critical reason (CR) is greater than 2.58 to being statistically significant. Besides the correlation coefficient (Standardized Regression Weight) are high and significant from the statistical point of view. Consequently, the model can be considered acceptable and consistent scientific validity as an instrument for estimating attitudinal competences of counselors.

**TABLE 3. Goodness of fit of the estimated free parameters**

			Regression Weights			Standardized
			<i>Estimate</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R.</i>	<i>Regression Weights</i>
			<i>Estimate</i>			<i>Estimate</i>
<b>I10</b>	<---	to act	1.00			.73
<b>I2</b>	<---	to act	.62	.10	6.12	.59
<b>I7</b>	<---	to act	.74	.15	4.85	.47
<b>I8</b>	<---	to act	.74	.12	6.48	.62
<b>I15</b>	<---	to act	.64	.10	6.38	.61
<b>I11</b>	<---	to act	.89	.11	8.12	.77
<b>I16</b>	<---	to act	.57	.09	6.09	.58
<b>I14</b>	<---	to act	.87	.12	7.12	.68
<b>I13</b>	<---	to act	.75	.11	7.08	.68
<b>I9</b>	<---	to act	.67	.13	5.32	.51
<b>I6</b>	<---	to act	.65	.10	6.37	.61
<b>I5</b>	<---	to be	1,00			.66
<b>I3</b>	<---	to be	1,03	.15	6.81	.73
<b>I12</b>	<---	to be	.98	.17	5.87	.62
<b>I1</b>	<---	to be	.99	.20	4.96	.51
<b>I4</b>	<---	to be	1.07	.18	5.82	.61

## Discussion

The Organic Law of Education (2006) assigns counselors a key role in the on-time detection of any students' educational or personal problems (Guisande, Páramo, Soares & Almeida, 2007), together with advising to teaching staff and families. This new role in counseling (Clark & Stone, 2000; Northouse, 2004; Rodicio, 2012) must cover all educational community in the most systemic (Amatea & Clark, 2005) and preventive way. The conceptual confusion drawn from official documents (CEDEFOP, 2009; Winterton, Delamare-Le Deist & Stringfellow, 2005) must make way for a concept of competency as the main identifiable and stable activity that the educational and

vocational counselor must achieve to an efficient professional performance (Caballero & Blanco, 2007).

The results assert that school counselors in Education attach great importance to attitudinal competences, preferably the “knowing how to act” (participative competences) against the “knowing how to be” (personal competences). It is constated, a dispersion of functions that regulations and educational communities assign to counselors (Janson, Stone & Clark, 2009; Santana, 2008), emphasizing the need to establish advisory models (Álvarez & Bisquerra, 2008) that include attitudinal competences in developing tasks (August, Aguilar & Salguero, 2008; Repetto & Pena, 2010; Villa & Poblete, 2007). So, understanding competence as the ability to answer successfully to a demand, task or problem, mobilizing and combining personal and environment resources (OCDE, 2005), our results coincide with different investigations (McMahon, Mason & Paisley, 2009; Repetto & Perez - Gonzalez, 2007; Vélaz de Medrano, 2008) stating that the role of the counselors is a social construction formalizing from the needs of the centers, it must include competences in knowledge (conceptual), know-how (procedural), and especially, know to be (attitudinal).

Therefore, it is highlighted that in order to be a counselor with good prospects, the personal, social and mainly participative behavior plays an important role. This is also reflected in the model that advocates for a modern conception of counseling centered on collaboration and dynamization amongst professionals, within prevention and in the framework of the curriculum – educational model, constructivist model, understanding advising model and program-based intervention-. The inclusive nature given to the three kinds of professional competences that a counselor must possess (knowledge, abilities/skills and attitudes) cannot be interpreted strictly, as each of them is usually considered an indicator of their professionalism. However, the existing monopoly in the sole interest of the competences referred to knowledge and skills, and against the attitudinal kind, must be broken, understand as relatively controlled educational trials, deliberate and conscious (Briñol, Horcajo, Becerra, Falces & Sierra, 2002).

### *Educational implications*

It can be stated that training programs in competences for counselors must not only transmit knowledge and skills, but cultural, social and attitudinal aspects that have to do with people's abilities must also be considered (Sobrado, 2012). We point at the need to include not just knowledge (know) or abilities and skills (know how to do) in school counselors' training, but also to incorporate the acquisition of attitudes (know how to be/ know how to act) into their professional competences (Adams, McNeil & Dubsick, 2004). In the investigation, the questionnaire used presents a factorial structure and a satisfactory internal consistency, similar to that obtained in some other opinion tests about counselors' competences (DiPerna & Elliot, 1999; Echeverría, 2005; Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera & Ramos, 2004).

In appraising the results reported herein, some limitations of the study should be considered. First, it must be emphasized that the data were obtained via self-reports (quantitative methodology); in the future, it would be advisable to complement this type of data with information from sources other than the individual himself (qualitative methodology). Furthermore, it's necessary to gather more evidence of validity to support the predictive ability of the questionnaire's attitudinal competences, and these will be a long process.

Immersed in the necessity and difficulty of delimiting counselors' professional profile in the Spanish context, the institutional challenge will be to define their roles and professional competences. This study, beyond lending production of knowledge to the field of educational and



vocational guidance, is a headway to favor the acquisition of attitudinal competences in counseling training, contributing to the strengthening of counseling services in terms of quality, ethics and compromise in their interventions.

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