

## GUIDING AND INCLUDING VULNERABLE-DRIVEN POPULATIONS

### Process of Vocational Guidance in the Transgender Popular Mocha Cellis High School

Nora Julia Kanje<sup>1\*</sup>

#### Overview

The work presents a vocational guidance proposal that was carried out in the Transgender Popular “Mocha Cellis”, High School in 2014.

The intention is to promote reflection on the transgender population in terms of social and educational inclusion, and contribute to give visibility to the difficulties they experience.

The proposal invites counselors to reflect on their own choices; such as the way to think about transgender population; and to assume the design of ethical guiding approaches.

**Key words:** Inclusion, gender, ethics, hospitality, vulnerable-driven.

*“Thinking is always thinking differently and thus it is necessary to produce a rupture, making visible and enunciating another thing.” [...] “Truth is not such, it occurs as the result of an intersection of strengths, and it is, above all, the production of sense and value.” Gilles Deleuze*

This work mentions the actions carried out in terms of vocational guidance within the Transgender Popular Mocha Cellis High School, in the City of Buenos Aires, during the last months of school year 2014.

Such interventions were done in the context of an agreement between the High School and the Course of Vocational Guidance of the School of Psychology of Maimonides University. It was carried out *a posteriori* to a colleague’s demand from the Social Work Course (UBA) who was doing an internship within the mentioned High School. The Mocha Cellis is the first school in the world with

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\* Coordinator in the Inclusion-Disabilities area at APORA (Argentine Association of Guidance Professionals in the Argentine Republic). Professor of Vocational Guidance, Career: Psychology, Maimonides University. E-mail: [norakanje@gmail.com](mailto:norakanje@gmail.com)

an open gender perspective; moreover, it includes any student who wishes to complete *their* High School. Though not exclusively, the population attending this School is mostly transgender.

This process was carried out together with the Full Professor of the Vocational Guidance Course in Maimonides University, who coordinated it and with whom this intervention was accomplished, Prof. Adriana Gullco, B.A. Prof. Gullco started the first exchanges with the abovementioned High School, also managing instances for the supervision of the task. To that end, Ms Sandra Borakievic, B.A., highly contributed as well, both during the process and after its conclusion, analyzing what had been done and generating estimations, hypothesis and proposals for the future. These supervisions were generated in the context of Ms Borakievic's investigation: Design and Implementation of Group Tools to Clarify Mechanisms of Inequalities of Erotic, Loving, Conjugal and Parental Contemporary Diversities, pertaining to the Extension Programme, Course 1 Theory and Group Techniques, School of Psychology, UBA.

### **A) The process of vocational orientation. Or... "The processes"?**

To refer to the process of guidance done implies, at least, to focus on it from three different perspectives. Chronologically speaking, the first process was directed to us, the professionals who assumed the task as guides and, redundantly, it consisted on the "processing" of the demand received. At the very beginning, listening to it, thinking about it- from different point/s of view, as Deleuze says, and expressing our will to face or not the challenge of working on this activity.

This reflection was done both personally and institutionally within the course we were part of. Not considering the times and instances implied to each of us, it was finally decided to give a positive answer and design actions according to the request received. From the personal point of view, the participation and work done in diverse Special educational centre<sup>2</sup> and "Special" included in ordinary schools of various formats, gave me the chance to consider the mentioned High School just as another school, but it led me to think deeply about its specificity and the extreme need of collaborating to the aim of making it visible.

A formal school where it is not only possible to carry on vocational guidance but where it must be done, as mentioned in our National Education Act No 26206, in its articles and sections referred to Secondary School.

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2 NT: In Argentina, schools where students with disabilities and/or specific learning difficulties attend are called "Special".

This aspect was considered together with the understanding that vocational guidance involves in itself a learning process as regards one's own possibilities and those offered by the context. That is, a learning process to be able to choose listening to one's own will. All these considerations were decisive to accept the responsibility of taking action. This position is based on an ethical perspective – and not moral, as consequently regulated- which as Skliar mentioned, refers to the existence of others. Ethics related to being able to open a space within rules, so that, precisely, others can arise. (Skliar Carlos; 2015; pages 6 and 7)

Definitely, that was what the process was about; to make it one's own the positioning of an active listening, ethical, exactly the same as what we do with any of the students consulting those who decide to guide their vocational paths, taking into account the specificity and contextualization of their experiences and stories.

Positioning which is strongly related to the concept of inclusion, with this having the condition, at least necessary, of ethics in the above mentioned sense. These conceptualizations were the base of the referred action, meaning that every subject is a subject who holds rights, the same way that every subject is a wishing subject, not considering how vulnerable-driven they may be.

Both aspects, having rights and wishes grant possibilities to offer an inclusive intervention (in guidance, as well) and involves the certainty that our actions with the other will possibly constitute an experience producing subjectivity.

No doubt it is also pertaining, as obvious it might seem, to make it explicit and assume responsibility while doing so, that whichever the consultation might be and/or whoever the person consulting, we -the guides- are affected by our own limitations. It is expected, then, to have an attitude-and-concept availability to carefully revise and supervise how much the situation impact us within the guidance coordinated, no matter which the vulnerable-driven aspects the consultation involves.

b) The second process, following a mere chronological order to clarify the exposition, refers to what was actually done.

We hereby find sense to the plural used in the subtitle (section A). It refers to the processes walked by each of the members of the group. Processes which are impossible to explain in detail due to confidentiality, taking into account inferences made possible by the different types of answers given by participants.

Objectively speaking, the process started with interviews to the Heads and School staff, which the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires named UGEE (*Unidades Gestión Educativa Experimental*, in Spanish. Experimental

Educational Management Unit). Students graduate after attending three years obtaining the Community Development Assistant Degree.

Such instance referred to the setting of objectives and the following tasks which were to be carried out so as to fulfill them. The atmosphere was definitely cordial, thankful and value was given to the answers and the proposal presented.

The participants of the activity would be third-year students and first graduates -first cohort- the number of which was estimated in eighteen/twenty students- due to the fact that the Secondary School had started functioning in 2011. Afterwards, the possibility of including students from second year was allowed. The Institution committed itself to spread the news through its virtual network, the access of which is private to the community of the school, also announcing on boards the different workshops offered. All of these were optional and they were logically organized with timetables adequate for students.

During this encounter, the school mentioned that they were going through a stage of absenteeism, usual during certain times of the year, which reverts when promotion and certification exam dates approach. The School Counselors who work at the High School, defined continuity as an aim to be achieved.

My personal experience allows me to say that this characteristic is absolutely shared by all school organizations with flexible and inclusive formats.

This might be the case because students know that, notwithstanding the attendance percentage is a necessary condition to get degrees -administratively speaking-together with the internalization of knowledge, their teaching-learning community will do anything possible to somehow justify the absences, without detriment of the quality of such knowledge. This is done with the only aim of helping them finish their studies and achieving objectives. So, in all "inclusive" schools, makeup instances with different formats are offered to guarantee continuity and the completion of studies.

The populations attending such schools are those crossed by strong vulnerabilities arising from the difficulty of sustaining processes, whichever they might be. In the case of Mocha High School, specifically speaking, students present very frequent health issues with a range of difficulty, facing severe obstacles, much more than those suffered by any other citizen with means, to have access to public health care in addition to precarious and marginal home and work. Moreover, the situations related to gender violence are very significant and well-known in some cases and turned invisible in others.

Another characteristic that defines the Mocha Cellis High School in respect to other inclusive institutions is that, in general, the latter are open to any person considering

certain previously announced requisites. These are not present at Mocha Cellis. For example, Re-entry Schools in the City of Buenos Aires, created to host students of age (above 16) who had been out of the schooling system for at least a year also accept, in their strong inclusive principles, other young people asking to be enrolled due to their feeling of not being accepted in their schools of origin. Some students even ask for enrollment in other schools, such as the Re-entry ones, because of being pregnant despite the fact that the ESI (*Educación Sexual Integral* / Integral Sexual Education) Act is valid. The coordinators of the Programme Father-Students and Mother-Students are the ones who proposed this change. The Mocha Cellis does not demand any special requisite, so that young people and adults can integrate its courses when they have felt a strong uprooting from their schools of origin, were left out and could not build a place as students. So, when wanting to complete their secondary school, they choose the Mocha Cellis and in occasions, though not always, they state it is due to proximity from its venue to their homes.

As regards the development of the action, it started with a first group meeting during school hours offered by their teacher who also participated in the activity with prospective participants. They were third-year students and some from second year invited because they were at the Institution at the time.

It was presented as a first contact to introduce each other and to tell them about our task; to listen to their expectations and answers to what was suggested; to know what students thought about vocation and/or “what-to-do” after completing their schooling.

To that end, after personal introductions of all attendees, game dynamics were proposed inserting pertinent information according to the questions made in relation to careers, school venues, institutions and professions.

When finished, we made a first roll of those who wanted to participate in the workshops, which was later modified due to school diffusion and changes in some students' decisions.

An agenda was agreed upon with the School staff during the previous meeting, which was announced to students in order to be able to define times for the next encounter. However, the plan suffered various changes for, as it usually happens in schools and this was not to be the exception, many unexpected or not duly considered situations arose: school outings which, although previously planned, had to change dates or times. Another event that generated changes was the National Women's Meeting, in another province, where many of these students participated. These “set” variables occurred during the process, which had to be permanently thought of, re-read and readjusted.

Our action considered the completion of individual interviews in the context of absolute confidentiality openly explicit to those willing to participate in the workshops. Such interviews were done during those times and dates when some members of the group were absent making it impossible to perform group activities and rescheduling them for future encounters.

These interviews were thought of focusing on two aspects: getting significant information about their life experiences and future expectations which might be sensitive for vocational choice; and to generate a bond of trust between students interviewed and professionals.

The group meeting, that is the first workshop where nine students participated, was finally done and somehow all the objectives and contents initially mentioned to start the process were explained again; wishes, vocation, projects, possibilities, study and work were mentioned.

All these aspects were systematically considered within a context protected by the confidentiality specially mentioned when working individually.

In these individual interviews, students were asked to write their bios. Some of them were read in that first workshop, giving place to reflection and moving all of us, both for the evident strength shown in their lifetime histories, resources and potentialities as for the suffering mentioned at different times.

On the one hand, the proposed objectives were that students:

- Appreciate the chance to be the main characters in their possible choices based on inquiry and reflection.
- Know the range of possibilities of higher-level studies at hand.
- Anticipate the diverse options of study and work.

To move onto them, the following dynamics and/or techniques were used:

- Group game proposals.
- Selection of newspaper cut-outs/ articles and group reflection on a range of careers related to those cut-outs.
- Individual written productions shared with their peers.
- Use of information guides of diverse origins.
- Virtual searches.
- Future expectations.
- Vocation as a social construction.
- Career information. Which careers exist; do I imagine myself attending an institution of higher-level studies?

- Seeking necessary information: venues and attendance requisites.

Multiplicity of questions arose during these encounters, among which the following “finding” was highlighted due to its significance even to us, guides throughout this process.

While virtually searching for requisites to attend the career of Surgical Instrumentalist – one of the students was willing to access to such career- we found out that in the UBA website it is expressly mentioned, among other requisites

“Women exclusively (due to conditions of infrastructure in such venue)”.

Not considering the fact that nowadays this caption does not appear or that the requisite cannot be found as a condition to be enrolled, it was very moving to read such statement based on the fact that there are toilets only for women. And that such a condition becomes an obstacle when not belonging to that gender, the feminine one.

The impact caused in the context of the Mocha Cellis High School was even higher considering that all toilets are gender-neutral.

Six meetings were planned and agreed upon; only four with a lower percentage and discontinuity of attendance were finally completed, except for a student who was always present. The absences were based on illnesses extending for several days; other tasks they had to do during those times; eventual absence at school that day; leaving before usual time of more serious problems which had to be solved immediately and of course fully justified, such as where they would sleep that night for having lost the lodging available so far.

So, we can say that discontinuity to sustain schooling in its different modalities was systematically observed: from a large-scale point of view considering the whole school year and from a small-scale point of view, in the context of a short-term proposal as this process has been, the type of absences abovementioned occurred.

However, the disposition and attitude of all participants when present resulted in great value to the space, with plenty of disposition to talk of even the most hurtful aspects of life, with emphasis on the expectations -arising from their feelings of belonging to the Mocha High School and under the light of new laws and regulations- of beginning and facing a different type of life.

Moreover, in the fourth workshop, two students who had not participated before attended actively sharing and working within the group.

During all these proposals and not considering diverse dynamics and personal intensity, many expressions of willingness to keep on studying were heard; the extreme need to get a worthy job and with the personal variations of each of the members of

the group, they expressed openly and very clearly their opinions in respect to each of the proposals offered by the professionals coordinating the process.

Students referred to their lives through written texts, read and shared within the group or through drawings; completion of phrases proposed; reading and reflection shared in group; songs and a number of expressions “simply” verbalized with great emotional and touching content for all of us.

Though students were interested and expressed thankfulness in different ways, in general terms, they did not want – or could not?- commit themselves to new timetables so as to reschedule meetings, not even individual ones, which were offered as well.

The imminent end of the school year (November), the preparations of a celebration of the school history and its achievements, the shooting of an institutional video and specially the graduation celebration were, on the other hand, extremely motivating for them all.

In spite of obvious differences, when you work with students attending the last year of their secondary school in any institution (*in Argentina*), it is well known that graduation trips and celebrations related to closure absolutely absorb and implicate them. They are not at their best time to reflect upon future choices. It is the stage when they fully feel themselves as students “for the last time”, not contemplating if they will continue studies of future university careers or higher-level ones or not. So why would this school be any different from the rest?

The above said does not imply we should ignore in any way the specificity of the context and the huge diversity found there, clearly seen in suffering and complex personal life histories, mainly affected by unthinkable situations for most of us, considering how they survive and face their daily life. It is important to mention that the end-of-the-year and closure of secondary schooling festive spirit also “belonged” to them and it was probably one of the very few spaces where they could perform this “festive”, “celebratory” role of students -of “adolescents”- without acknowledging their real age, in an environment that so nicely hosted them.

Likewise, that was the moving and gratifying spirit felt throughout the graduation ceremony, celebrated in the National Ministry of Education where graduates received their diploma, each at a time, and where we were cordially invited.

During and after the workshops, the members of school staff were offered assessment instances in relation to what has been done and enhanced proposals for the following school year- role of tutors, for eg. Only some of these meetings could be accomplished; the proposal did not flourish for no answer was received.



c) Finally, a third “process” results as a challenge when reconsidering the original significance and while re-reading in a kind of “*go back over what had already been seen*”, having time passed and with a new meaning given to what was done and livedthrough. Re thinking what was originally thought but from another perspective and, precisely, finding the reason why we had faced and handled the experience as done through this process.

Vulnerability suffered by the Trans population still exits and painfully hits, despite the soft-impact achievements and improvements obtained. It continues giving (us) reasons to collaborate and work on vocational guidance of Trans populations and to promote spaces effectively opened for them.

### **B) Some concepts and reflections to follow a profound study in the context of inclusive vocational guidance.**

Dr Diana H. Maffia expressed in a lecture (2007) that gender refers to the way in which each human group interprets human sexuality.

She mentioned that it is determined when born in direct relationship with genitivity. This generates per se ambiguity which deepens even more when, at the time of birth, there is a presence- more often than known to us- of both genitalia. She also stated that it is at school where the Trans population feels and suffers the biggest discrimination.

We fully agree with these last statements, adding that from the words of Mocha Cellis students it is analyzing their daily difficulties when trying to find -or not- a decent job when we can assume and express that their experiences in the working environment are also strongly discriminatory.

This situation of discrimination is much more generalized that most of us are willing to accept and we are all affected by it, one way or another. This makes us reflect upon the concept of hospitality presented by Carlos Skliar who used such term referring to its etymology when relating it to what implies and characterizes the virtue of those who hosted pilgrims, lodging and watching on their needs. (Skliar, 2015, page 27)

Skliar thinks that teaching with hospitality is a feeling and not just thinking about one’s own identity but it involves other ways of living and coexisting.

To reflect on that issue, Skliar continued, implies questioning the way we live and “are lived” in our relationships; it is to assume the difficulty to try this questioning considering the hostile space of non-communion in which we are immersed. (Skliar, 2015; pages 27 to 34).

According to Skliar, this issue also relates to the ambiguity such hospitality involves, (Skliar, 2015, pages 29 and 30): on the one hand, it means to receive and accept the other without conditions and, at the same time, it allows the presence of a place where the other has to give answers, mention their names, introduce themselves, even asking to be *hosted*, so that, in the end hospitality arises from a different position: that of power. Surely, the power of questioning the other.

This is all about complexity, as a paradigm, as Morin expressed. (Morin, 2007, pages 13; 93;125)

Complex as it may sound though, thinking about how to improve and deepen a hospitable attitude implies profound thought and it is not a minor subject. We must also consider that both areas, health and education, are directly affected by such an attitude together with the positions of power therein involved.

It would be justified whether it is to foster a stronger satisfactory school retention which does not only refer to the Trans population attending secondary schools, or to effectively constitute the health services in health care systems any respected population deserves; moreover considering the high rates of early death in the Trans population (about thirty- five years old).

There is so much to do to that end, starting with a vocational-guidance task in institutions (existing legislation) which should be developed and be a part of the formal planning –meaning the Institutional Project- of each school.

Stern mentioned stigmatization as community produce (Stern Fernando, 2005, page and referred to the causes which promoted it. This concept exceeds the limits of this work to study it in depth, but it is necessary to mention that of “stigma”, as, undoubtedly, an obstacle and barrier to inclusion, in general, and to the construction of a hospitable society.

What Ana M. Fernandez brought up when emphasizing on **vulnerable-driven populations** –no longer vulnerable- (Fernandez, 2013, page7) articulates in a caring way with what had been previously said. We consider absolutely important taking this expression into account in any inclusive approach. Fernandez stated that the visibility of sexual diversity promoted the denaturing of the sexual order itself, typical of Modernity and consequently of the specific characteristics of the production of sexual identity. (Fernandez, 2013, page 21). In this way Fernandez remarked that the disciplinary division into two sexes is being questioned as included in a binary logic where difference is considered as sick and dangerous.

That is why she proposed the transition from difference to diversities, even more considering the multiplicity of expressions referring to sexual diversity. (Fernandez; 2013, pages 21 to 26)

It would be necessary to be careful with the meaning given to concepts and words defining them. It is interesting to note that Skliar developed the concept of difference –actually, one of his most recent texts has “Pedagogy of the Differences” as its title, granting the word “difference” the value of “generating identity”. It is the differentiation from others what helps the construction of one’s-own-identity-forming process.

Moreover, Skliar considered how much we prioritize the different –he even used the term obsessively- above differences themselves, undervaluing or ignoring their importance in the construction of subjectivity. (Skliar; 2008, page 9). Different indicating whoever they might be: elderly people, immigrants, black population, Trans, etc. to the point that we feel we cannot humanly approach them if we are not experts, technicians in any of the subjects of study that relates to them: gender, intellectual disabilities, etc. (Skliar; 2008, page 249).

Last, and due to the fact that we are referring to “processes”, we know it is essential to give time to generate a demand and process the experiences.

We are deeply thankful for the openness shown by the Mocha Cellis High School so that the above mentioned could be developed and we understand the difficulties that might originate and how unsettling these encounters could be, evaluating that they are being proposed but not yet accomplished.

It has been certainly felt how much suffering circulates within the Mocha High School, but, at the same time, how strongly they are battling for each achievement, how much they profit from it with the certainty that they keep on thinking “differently” in one or many ways.

This experience constituted a first and enriching encounter- thus verbalized not only by those who were in charge of the experience but also by all the students who participated and school staff as well.

It is probably necessary for us, who consider it essential and choose to do it, to take responsibility for the thinking -differently no doubt- and to assume the challenge of generating from the area of vocational guidance actual conditions, so that demands fostering spaces for intervention in Trans environments are heard and, last but not least, to be able to give -above all- ethical answers.