ESTUDIOS

THE ORIGIN, EVOLUTION, AND CURRENT STATUS OF STUDENT GUIDANCE COMPETENCIES IN THE UNITED STATES

ORIGEN, EVOLUCIÓN Y ESTADO ACTUAL DE LAS COMPETENCIAS DE ORIENTACIÓN EDUCATIVA EN EE.UU.

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ABSTRACT

The authors provide an exposition of the origin, evolution, and current status of student guidance competencies as a part of comprehensive guidance programs in the United States. The ways in which student guidance competencies are selected, organized, and delivered are described. Finally, examples of how student mastery of guidance competencies is being assessed are presented.

RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL

El artículo presenta el origen, la evolución y el estado de la cuestión respecto a las competencias orientadoras a alcanzar por los estudiantes como parte de los programas comprensivos de orientación en los EE.UU. Generalmente, dichas competencias se han identificado con los conocimientos, habilidades y actitudes que los estudiantes necesitan para facilitar su desarrollo, expresados generalmente en forma de metas y objetivos a alcanzar en diversos ámbitos: el académico, el personal/social y el profesional. Desde finales de los años 90, existe una tendencia creciente a definir dichas competencias como «estándares» a alcanzar, otorgándoles el mismo nivel de importancia dentro del currículo que el resto de conocimientos y habilidades a adquirir en las disciplinas académicas. Se describen las formas en que estas competencias son seleccionadas, clasificadas y desarrolladas. Finalmente, se proporcionan ejemplos de evaluación de la adquisición de dichas competencias en estudiantes.

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The Origin, Evolution, and Current Status of Student Guidance Competencies in the United States

Over the past ninety plus years that guidance and counseling has been part of the schools of the United States, attention has focused on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (student guidance competencies) that students need to facilitate their academic, career, and personal/social development. What student competencies should be taught to students and what approaches should be used to teach them these competencies have been the subject of professional debate over many years. This debate continues today.

It is the purpose of this article to describe the origin, evolution, and current status of student guidance competencies. The first part of the article focuses on the origin and evolution of student guidance competencies. The second part of the article describes their current status. Included is a review of the ways they are being selected, organized, and delivered. Finally, the article describes a number of ways student mastery of guidance competencies are being assessed.

Origin and Evolution of the Idea

When guidance in the schools of the United States began to emerge in the early 1900s under the banner of vocational guidance, it was seen as a societal response to economic, educational, and social concerns of the times. Economic concerns focused on the need to better prepare workers for the workplace while educational concerns arose from a need to increase efforts in schools to help students find purpose for their education as well as their employment. Social concerns emphasized the need for changing school methods and organization as well as exerting more control over the conditions of labor in child-employing industries (United States Bureau of Education, 1914).

Credit is given to Frank Parsons (1909) for first using the phrase vocational guidance in the United States and for describing the principles and methods involved. In his book «Choosing a Vocation» published in 1909, a year after his death, he stated:

> In the wise choice of a vocation there are three broad factors: (1) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations, and their causes; (2) a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines or work; (3) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of facts (p. 5).

Parsons' three step approach to vocational guidance identified the knowledge he felt that individuals needed to make a decision as well as the process they would use to make a decision. While he did not use the word competency, it is easy to see how the words in these three factors could be cast in the language of student competencies that we use today. For example, for the first factor, a competency statement might be «I understand my interests and aptitudes». A competency statement for the second factor might be «I know what employers expect of applicants and employees». For the third factor a competency statement might be «I know the 12 steps in a rational decision-making process».

Over the next five decades of the 20th century, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes embodied in vocational guidance as described by Parsons, became embedded in a wide variety of courses and other learning experiences in schools. As an example, Davis (1914) inaugurated a plan to teach concepts of vocational guidance through the English curriculum in Grand Rapids Michigan. The following general topics were covered in each of the following grades:

– Seventh grade: Vocation ambition
– Eighth grade: The value of education
– Ninth grade: The elements of character that make for success
– Tenth grade: The world's work – a call to service
– Eleventh grade: Choosing a vocation
– Twelfth grade: Preparation for one's life work

Try-out experiences, exploratory classes, classes in occupations, field trips, plus a wide variety of other guidance strategies were often used in the schools of the United States to assist students to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make informed vocational, educational, and personal/social decisions. The emphasis during these decades was on activities, not on students outcomes expressed as student competencies.

While the idea of student guidance competencies was present from the very beginning of guidance in the schools of the United States, the use of this specific language did not begin to appear with any frequency until the 1960s under such labels as goals, developmental goals, and objectives (Gysbers & Moore, 1973). This was the era in the schools of targeting education toward specific behavioral objectives and the beginnings of the development and implementation of comprehensive systematic approaches to guidance and counseling in the schools (Gysbers & Moore, 1975).

One of the tasks during this time period was the identification of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (competencies) that students needed to be successful in school and beyond. Student guidance competencies often expressed as goals and objectives were generally grouped in such domains as (a) personal, social, career, and educational development; (b) knowledge of self and others, career planning and exploration, and educational and vocational development; or (c) learning, personal/social development, and career/vocational development. These domains served to identify areas of human growth and from which student competencies were drawn.

Beginning in the 1980s the state of Missouri (Gysbers, Kosteck Bunch, Magnuson, & Starr, 2002) organized student competencies within three domains, under each of which were listed a number of categories containing specific student competencies. Listed below are those three domains and the corresponding category titles.

• *Career Planning and Exploration*
  – Planning and developing one's own career
  – Understanding how being male or female relates to job and careers
  – Making decisions about college
  – Planning high school classes
  – Learning how to use leisure time now and in the future

• *Knowledge of Self and Others*
  – Understanding and accepting myself

- Understanding and getting long with others
- Knowing how drugs and alcohol affect me and my friends
- Learning about marriage and family responsibilities

- *Educational/Vocational Development*
  - Making decisions
  - Finding jobs
  - Improving basic skills and study/learning skills
  - Learning from friends and others who have graduated
  - Vocational selection and training

Under each category, lists of student guidance competencies were organized by grade level groupings. For the state of Missouri the grade level groups were kindergarten through grade three (K-3), grade four through grade six (4-6), grade six through grade nine (6-9), and grade nine through grade twelve (9-12). Grades kindergarten through three and grade four through grade 6 are the elementary school grades, grade six through grade nine are the middle school grades, while grade nine through grade twelve are the high school grades. The overlap of grades was necessary in the state model because local school districts vary in how grade levels are grouped to form their elementary, middle, and high schools.

For each category lists of student guidance competencies were organized by the grade level groupings of K-3, 4-6, 6-9, and 9-12. To illustrate please find below the student guidance competencies that were listed under the domain knowledge of self and others and the category understanding and accepting myself for grades 9-12.

- *Knowledge of Self and Others*
  - Understanding and accepting myself
    I understand what is important to me.
    I understand, accept, and like myself.
    I have confidence in myself.
    I understand how my feelings affect my behavior.
    I am able to state my own ideas.
    I can handle personal difficulties.
    I can deal with life when I feel down.

In 1987, in a national effort to develop student guidance competencies, the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) initiated the National Career Development Guidelines project. The Guidelines, modified in 1996, identified student and adult competencies for elementary, middle/junior high school, high school, and adult levels. The competencies at these levels were organized around the three domains of self knowledge, educational and occupational experiences, and career planning.

Current Status

Beginning in the late 1990s the overall way of labeling student guidance competencies changed. Domain titles such as academic, personal/social, and career continued to be used, but the overall title used to label them changed to standards. This was the same word used to describe the knowledge and skill base for academic disciplines such as mathematics, science, and language arts. The use of the word standards to label student

guidance competencies is an important development because it places them at the same level of importance in the schools as the knowledge and skill base for the academic disciplines.

An example of this new language appears in *The ASCA (American School Counselor Association) National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (2003) as follows:

- *Academic Development Standards*
  A) Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span.
  B) Students will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college.
  C) Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

- *Career Development Standards*
  A) Students will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relations to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions.
  B) Students will employ strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction.
  C) Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education and training, and the world of work.

- *Personal/Social Development Standards*
  A) Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others.
  B) Students will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.
  C) Students will understand safety and survival skills.

Another example of the use of the word standards is occurring in the state of Missouri where guidance personnel are revising the original list of student guidance competencies written in the 1980s. They will now be called content standards paralleling the use of that term for the academic disciplines in the schools of Missouri. There will be nine standards grouped under the domain titles personal and social development, academic development, and career development as follows:

- *Personal and Social Development Standards*
  1. Understanding self as an individual and as a member of local and global communities
  2. Interacting with others in ways that respect individual and group differences
  3. Applying personal safety skills

- *Academic Development Standards*
  1. Applying skills needed for educational achievement
  2. Applying the skills of transitioning between educational levels
  3. Developing and monitoring personal educational plans

- *Career Development Standards*
  7. Applying career exploration and planning skills in the achievement of life goals
  8. Knowing where and how to obtain information about the world of work
  9. Applying employment readiness and the skills for on-the-job success

(Magnuson & Roof, 2003)

In addition to the use of the word standard to label student guidance competencies, there also is a major effort underway today to add student guidance competencies that emphasize diversity/multiculturalism. An example of this is found in the new Missouri standards, standard two «Interacting with others in ways that respect individual and group differences» (Magnuson & Roof, 2003). Sink (2002) also stressed the need to add this dimension to student guidance competencies. He offered the following example:

> Summary Competencies of a Multicultural Student Citizen within the Framework of a Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling Program

> By Grade 12, students will demonstrate
> • An understanding and appreciation for their own culture and the cultures of others.
> • Critical thinking in the exploration of sociocultural and political ideas.
> • An ability to reason about issues from local, national, and global perspectives.
> • An understanding of important American values (e.g., justice, tolerance, responsibility).
> • An understanding of the basic rights of all human beings as embodied in the Bill of Rights.
> • The ability to express appropriately an opinion on important social and political issues while listening and respecting the views of others.
> • The ability to cooperate/collaborate with others in school and community settings.
> • How to resolve interpersonal conflicts peacefully. (p. 133)

Selecting and Organizing Student Guidance Competencies

A high priority task facing a local school district is selecting the appropriate student guidance competencies to emphasize. What knowledge should students gain, what skills should students develop, and what attitudes should students form as a result of participating in a local school district's comprehensive guidance program? Another high priority task is selecting the domains or areas that will organize the competencies into meaningful groups and assigning/aligning them to age appropriate grade levels.

To complete these tasks, local school districts often begin with lists of student guidance competencies drawn from models outlined by professional organizations or state departments of education such as those just described. Sometimes such lists are adopted as is and sometimes they are modified to fit the goals of a local school district. Often school districts survey students, parents, and teachers to recommend which student guidance competencies are most important. Based on the data from these surveys, specific student guidance competencies are then chosen.

Once a school district has selected the domains that fit the goals of the district and has identified the student guidance competencies to be included in each domain, the next task is to organize the sequence of student guidance competencies kindergarten through grade 12. To do so requires attention to some assumptions about human and growth and development.

1. Individual development is a process of continuous and sequential (but not necessarily uninterrupted or uniform) progress toward increased effectiveness in the management and mastery of the environment for the satisfaction of psychological and social needs.

2. The stage, or level, of individuals' development at any given point is related to the nature and accuracy of their perceptions, the level of complexity of their conceptualizations, and the subsequent development rate and direction. No individual in an educational setting is at a zero point in development; hence change must be measured from some relative point rather than from an absolute.

3. Positive developmental changes are potential steps toward the achievement of higher level purpose goals. This interlocking relationship dictates that achievement at a particular growth stage be viewed as a means to further development rather than as an end result.

4. Environmental or situational variables provide the external dimension of individual development. Knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, values, and aspirations are the product of the interaction of these external variables with the internal variables that characterize the individual.

5. The developmental learning process moves from a beginning level of awareness and differentiation (perceptualization), to the next level of conceptualizing relationships and meanings (conceptualization), to the highest level of behavioral consistency and effectiveness by both internal and external evaluation (generalization). (Wellman & Moore, 1975, pp. 55-56)

A major task is to arrange student guidance competencies, kindergarten through grade 12, so that they follow a theoretically sound developmental scope and sequence. Note the learning theory concepts perceptualization, conceptualization, and generalization mentioned in assumption 5. These concepts serve as guidelines for this important task. (Wellman & Moore, 1975)

Perceptualization Level

Competencies at this level emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and focus attention on selected aspects of the environment and self. The knowledge and skills most relevant are those that individuals need in making appropriate life role decisions and in responding to the demands of the school and social environment. Competencies at the perceptualization level reflect accuracy of perceptions, ability to differentiate, and elemental skills in performing functions appropriate to the individual's level of development. Competencies at this level are classified under two major categories: *environmental orientation* and *self-orientation*.

Environmental orientation competencies emphasize the individual's awareness and acquisition of knowledge and skills needed to make life role decisions and to master the demands of life career settings and events. The competencies at this level are essentially cognitive in nature and have not necessarily been internalized to the extent that the individual attaches personal meaning to the acquired knowledge and skills. A primary and universally applicable goal of guidance is the development of knowledge and skills to enable individuals to understand and meet the expectations of their school and social environment and to recognize the values underlying social limits.

Self-orientation competencies focus on the development of accurate self-perceptions. One aspect of an accurate awareness of self is the knowledge of one's abilities, aptitudes,

interests, and values. An integral part of identity is individuals' ability to understand and accept the ways that they are alike and different from other individuals. Attention to life career decisions and demands relevant to immediate adjustment and future development are considered a prerequisite to an understanding of the relationships between one's self and one's environment.

Conceptualization Level

Individual competencies at the conceptualization level emphasize action based on the relationships between perceptions of self and perceptions of the environment. The types of action sought are categorized into personally meaningful growth decisions and adaptive and adjustive behavior. The general goal at this level of development is to help individuals: (a) make appropriate choices, decisions, and plans that will move them toward personally satisfying and socially acceptable development; (b) take action necessary to progress within developmental plans; and (c) develop behavior to master their school and social environment as judged by peers, teachers, and parents. The two major classifications of conceptualization objectives are *directional tendencies* and *adaptive and adjustive behavior*.

Directional tendencies relate to individuals' movement toward socially desirable goals consistent with their potential for development. These competencies are indicators of directional tendencies as reflected in the choices, decisions, and plans that individuals are expected to make in ordering the course of their educational, occupational, and social growth. The acquisition of knowledge and skills covered by competencies at the perceptual level is a prerequisite to the pursuit of competencies in this category, although the need to make choices and decisions may provide the initial stimulus for considering perceptual competencies.

Adaptive and adjustive behaviors at the conceptualization level include competencies related to the application of self-environment concepts in coping with environmental pressures and in solving problems arising from the interaction of individuals and their environment.

Adaptive behavior refers to individuals' ability and skill to manage their school and social environment (with normative tolerances) to satisfy self-needs, to meet environmental demands, and to solve problems. There are two types of adaptive behavior. First, individuals may, within certain prescribed limits, control their environmental transactions by selection. For example, if they lack the appropriate social skills, they may avoid social transactions that demand dancing and choose those where existing abilities will gain the acceptance of the social group. Second, individuals may be able to modify their environment to meet their needs and certain external demands. For example, students who find sharing a room with a younger brother or sister disruptive to studying may be able to modify this situation by arranging to study elsewhere.

Adjustive behavior refers to the ability and flexibility of individuals to modify their behavior to meet environmental demands and to solve problems. Such behavior modification may include the development of new abilities or skills, a change of attitudes, or a change in method of operation or approach to the demand situation. In the examples of adaptive behavior just mentioned, individuals might use adjustive behavior by learning to dance rather

than avoiding dancing, and they might develop new study skills so they are able to study while sharing a room.

Generalization Level

Competencies at the generalization level imply a high level of functioning that enables individuals to: (a) accommodate environmental and cultural demands; (b) achieve personal satisfaction from environmental transactions; and (c) demonstrate competence through mastery of specific tasks and through the generalization of learned behavior, attitudes, and values to new situations. Behavior that characterizes the achievement of generalization-level competencies may be described as purposeful and effective by one's own or intrinsic standards and by societal or extrinsic criteria. Individuals should be able to demonstrate behavioral consistency, commitment to purpose, and autonomy in meeting educational, occupational, and social demands. Persons exhibiting such behavior therefore are relatively independent and predictable. Guidance competencies at this level are classified as *accommodation*, *satisfaction*, and *mastery*.

Accommodation competencies relate to the consistent and enduring ability to solve problems and to cope with environmental demands with minimum conflict. Accommodation of cultural and environmental demands requires that individuals make decisions and take action within established behavioral tolerances. The application of adaptive and adjustive behavior, learned in other situations and under other circumstances, to demand situations is inferred by the nature of the competencies classified in this category. The achievement of accommodation competencies can probably best be evaluated by the absence, or the reduction, of unsatisfactory coping behavior.

Satisfaction competencies reflect the internal interpretation that individuals give to their environmental transactions. Individual interests and values serve as criteria for evaluating the decisions made and the actions taken within the guidance domains. Although the evaluations of parents, peers, and authority figures may influence individuals' interpretations (satisfactions), these competencies become genuine only as they are achieved in congruence with the motivations and feelings of individuals. The description of satisfaction competencies consistent with guidance programming should include individuals' evaluation of affiliations, transactions, and adjustments in terms of personal adequacy, expectations, and congruency with a perceived ideal lifestyle. Expressed satisfactions, as well as behavioral manifestations from which satisfaction may be inferred (such as persistence), seem to be appropriate criterion measures. Congruency between measured interests and voluntarily chosen career activities also should be considered.

Mastery competencies include the more global aspects of achievement and generalization of attitudinal and behavioral modes. Long-range goals, encompassing large areas of achievement, are emphasized here rather than the numerous short-range achievements that may be required to reach a larger goal. For example, a young child becomes aware of task demands and different ways to meet them (perceptualization). At the conceptualization level, task-oriented behaviors are developed and made meaningful. Generalization (mastery) competencies reflect the internalization of these behaviors so that tasks are approached and achieved to the satisfaction of self and social expectations.

Delivering Student Guidance Competencies

The major way that student guidance competencies are delivered to students today is through comprehensive guidance programs. The program model used most often in the schools of the United States contains three basic elements. The elements are content, an organizational framework, and resources (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). The content element contains the student guidance competencies local school districts have selected for students to master. As noted earlier, they are now called standards, they are grouped by domains titled academic, career, and personal/social, and they are organized by grade levels or grade level groupings. The organizational framework contains three structural components (definition, rationale, and assumptions) and four program components (guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support). The resource element identifies the personnel and financial resources required to operate the program as well as the policies and rules that guide the program in action.

It is through the program components of the guidance curriculum and individual planning that students have opportunities to master the majority of student guidance competencies selected by local school districts. These two program components are the developmental parts of the guidance program. They are designed to deliver guidance activities and services systematically to all students so that all students are able to have access to the knowledge and practice the skills embodied in student guidance competencies.

Assessing Student Mastery of Guidance Competencies

To understand how student guidance competencies are assessed, it is first necessary to describe the overall process used to evaluate a comprehensive guidance program. To achieve accountability, evaluation of the program, its personnel, and its results is required. Program evaluation focuses on whether or not all aspects of the program are in place and functioning as they should. Personnel evaluation examines the degree to which and how well school counselors are fulfilling the roles they have been assigned to carry out their part of the program. Finally, results evaluation looks at the impact the program is having on students, their parents, and the school buildings in a local school district. Assessing the progress students are making in mastering the standards set through the selection and organization of guidance competencies is part of overall results evaluation.

The assessment of students' acquisition of guidance competencies is done immediately or soon after they have participated in a guidance activity or service. Three ways are recommended to collect the data to find out whether or not students have acquired the guidance competencies being taught through the activity or service. Students can write something, they can talk about something, or someone can observe their behavior (Johnson, 1991).

Before data can be collected based on these three ways, it is necessary to make sure that the competency to be acquired is clearly stated, the activity or service that will be used to help students develop the competency is described, and the person who will be responsible for teaching the activity is identified. In addition, it is important to describe when the assessment will take place and the criteria that will be used to judge the adequacy of what is written, said, or observed.

How can student guidance competency acquisition data be collected and evaluated? Based on the criteria chosen, short tests can be developed to assess students' knowledge. Such tests can be administered pre-post. Students can also write short research or reflection papers on the topic covered by the competency. Scoring guides (rubrics) can then be used to assess the contents of these papers and judge the degree of competency acquisition the students have attained. In addition, students can be observed carrying out certain tasks or participating in an activity. Using the criteria developed to judge the adequacy of competency attainment, school counselors or teachers can assess student progress as they observe students in action.

A Final Note

The focus on student guidance competencies is part of the history and tradition of guidance in the United States. This tradition recognizes that content for guidance (student guidance competencies) is an essential part of comprehensive guidance programs. Without content, guidance programs lose their developmental nature. Without content, guidance programs are unable to specify their contribution to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students acquire to aid them in their personal, social, career, and educational development.

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