Professions and Educational Counseling in Mexico and Latin America

Leticia Canales
Ricardo Blanco-Beledo

This article discusses educational counseling, the role it plays in the modern society in Mexico and in a larger sense, Latin America and its relationship with economic development. Educational counseling, that is the relationship between one's education and the job market, has in the past in Latin America been used to limit the possibilities for economic and political participation as well as to maintain an unequal distribution of resources. It has been useful to the technocratic sector of the state as a means of "improving" the efficiency of the educational system in the production of human resources required by the power groups for economic growth. At the same time it has been a useful tool for the power groups to divert public attention from structural problems affecting society and the economy.

Education and the Economy: Modernization and Utopia

Education is judged today based on whether students who leave school get a job or not. In this way the meaning of education is simplified and its values perverted. Such a view, however, cannot be sustained, because in any country investments and job creation do not grow concurrently. Currently a minority of students from privileged classes are the ones who will find jobs related to their profession. Meanwhile the majority will leave their studies unfinished and will occupy jobs not related to the preparation they received. One re-
searcher noted that the area of education is quite devastated, and that if the aim exists to aid its recovery, greater financial backing for educational projects is imperative. Accordingly, a real impulse for the democratization of education would be achieved, should government substantially increase salaries, finance laboratories and provide material help.

Since 1984 the proportion of drop-outs from the school system with little occupational preparation has increased markedly, while the preschool system has been paralyzed since 1987. For every 100 children who start grammar school, 57 finish. This is inefficient as well as inequitable, not only because it represents an absurd waste of resources, but also because the children the school expels come, precisely, from the poorer families. The social effect of this phenomenon is disastrous and affects the whole social welfare and productive potential of the country. At present it is estimated that there are about 26 million Mexican adults who did not finish grammar school education (Guevara N. 1991).

Without a doubt, with the new Free Trade Agreement efficiency and productivity are required central values defining the new economic horizon. These values would have to be in tune with a new concept of a higher order: "competence." With modernity on the horizon, in its Free Trade Agreement incarnation, education is a central strategic resource which may define new mutual economic relations on the world map. Education would be a more important resource than others such as oil, military power, high-tech, and electronics. Education, in the new world circumstances, occupies a central place in the development of nations. Education is no longer an element of development, it is the motor of development (Guevara, N., 1992)

The Professions

In Mexico, the achievement of a professional "project" implies access to important positions in the state apparatus. Only the economists seem to have obtained rights of access as leaders in the institutions of their field such as the Bank of Mexico, and the Treasury Department. Physicians, agronomists, and oil engineers have not been able to secure in a significant way their rights of leaderships in the institutions which correspond with their fields such as public health institutions, the Department of Agriculture etc. The tendency which is becoming apparent to Mexican professionals, is that they are