

Conceiving conscientisation and critical consciousness in career guidance and counselling: A reflection from voices in the Global South

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Abstract

The concept of critical consciousness has been embraced by various approaches that advocate social justice within career guidance. In this context, we revisit the Latin American origins of the ideas of *conscientização* ('conscientisation') and *consciência crítica* ('critical consciousness'), primarily associated with Paulo Freire in education and Ignacio Martín-Baró in psychology. We also examine their application in the career counselling of Rodolfo Bohoslavsky to emphasise the significance of these concepts in a global framework. We conclude that incorporating critical consciousness into career guidance and counselling is vital. However, we argue that there is a pressing need for contextualisation to refine these concepts politically and conceptually.

Keywords: Critical consciousness; Global South; interculturality; career guidance and counselling; Latin America

Introduction

Hooley et al. (2021) posited that the personal is political, suggesting that career guidance and counselling should aim for social justice and advocacy as fundamental principles. Achieving these goals is crucial for addressing the political and existential crises faced by diverse populations and socio-cultural and economic groups in the education and work fields.

Moreover, expanding and diversifying the audience for career guidance and counselling, along with enhancing its social and political commitment, is crucial. That is regarded as an urgent endeavour for ensuring social justice and promoting dignified career trajectories (Duffy et al., 2016; Richardson, 2012).

The career guidance and social justice movement (Hooley et al., 2021), the psychology of working theory (PWT; Duffy et al., 2016), and work and relationship counselling (Richardson, 2012) exemplify efforts to make career guidance and counselling more inclusive, diverse, and committed to social justice. Each of these approaches is built on the foundation of *consciência crítica* (*critical consciousness*, as it was translated into English), drawing inspiration from the work of Paulo Freire (1970).

The PWT (Duffy et al., 2016) defines critical consciousness as 'a careful and systematic analysis of one's social conditions, the perceived capacity to change them, and individual or collective action to reduce societal inequality' (p. 129).

The career guidance and social justice movement (Hooley et al., 2021) uses the concept of *conscientização* ('conscientisation', as it was translated into English, or the development of critical consciousness) which refers to 'helping people to develop a critical awareness of their surroundings, not just seeing what is happening in their lives and in the world, but also considering why these things are happening and in whose interest' (p. 60).

Richardson (2012) states that 'a contextualised understanding of how market work trajectories are co-constructed by both personal and social forces will enable the kind of critical consciousness that is an essential ingredient for a social justice approach to vocational psychology' (p. 207).

Scholars studying critical consciousness, such as Diemer et al. (2015), Diemer and Blustein (2006), and Watts et al. (2011), identify three key dimensions: critical reflection (or critical social analysis), political efficacy (or sense of agency), and critical action. Their studies and strategies are based on these dimensions (Diemer et al., 2015; Duffy et al., 2016).

While the concept of critical consciousness is well-defined, it is crucial to integrate the contextual, historical, and cultural discussions surrounding its use, particularly in global career guidance and counselling. Paulo Freire first introduced this concept in Latin America during the 1970s, and later by Ignacio Martín-Baró in the 1980s. It emerged in contexts marked by oppression, repression, state violence, and poverty, which significantly influenced its ontological, epistemological, and ethical-political foundations. These conditions of classism, authoritarianism, exclusion, and inequality have profoundly shaped people's experiences and identities.

There has been significant discussion regarding the relevance of mainstream career guidance and counselling concepts and practices, primarily proposed by developed countries in the Global North, in the contexts of the Global South due to socioeconomic and cultural differences (Arulmani, 2014; Leong & Pearce, 2011; Ribeiro, 2021; Sultana, 2018). These authors emphasise the need to contextualise theories and practices to ensure they are appropriate for the Global South. However, what happens when the situation is the opposite? Specifically, when Global North applies concepts and practices from the Global South in their contexts, do associated questions arise? Do issues of inequality, social justice, and emancipation carry the same meaning in both contexts?

Considering this, we revisit the Latin American origins of the concepts of *conscientização* ('conscientisation') and *consciência crítica* ('critical consciousness'). Henceforth, we will use the English translation to facilitate reading. We begin with the educational contributions of Paulo Freire in Brazil and Ignacio Martín-Baró's proposals for psychology in El Salvador. We highlight the career counselling proposed by Rodolfo Bohoslavsky in Argentina to debate their relevance in the global field of career guidance and counselling.

Our main aim is to draw attention to the fact that every concept is forged in a specific socio-cultural, economic, and political context and carries history behind it. Thus, when we import a concept, the specific context does not come with it, and we must reconstruct it, considering the specificities of the context in which it will be used. However, we should analyse the specificities of the contexts of origin, both politically and scientifically, to assess the potential of the concept reconstructed in the new context.

Conscientisation and critical consciousness were shaped in collectivist settings. To serve as a conceptual basis in a more individualistic context, especially those in developed regions where career guidance and counselling theories originate, their foundational assumptions should be reconsidered. Turning these concepts into individual capacities may compromise their intended transformative power.

Therefore, our central reflective question is whether concepts grounded in collectivist and unequal contexts can be imported into settings with very different characteristics without losing their theoretical, analytical, and practical power.

Theoretical background

We will briefly and synthetically present the conceptual basis analysed to sustain our discussion: praxis, conscientisation and critical consciousness, according to Freire's original proposal. It will be further discussed below.

Praxis is the dialectical unity of theory and practice, encompassing both action and reflection (Freire, 1970). Critical consciousness is a person's reflective, transformative, and co-created possibility to analyse social reality, power relations, and the injustices that surround them. It goes beyond mere perception of the world to critical analysis and transformative action (Freire, 1975). Conscientisation, or the development of critical consciousness, is both a process and a product of becoming aware of social inequalities and the possibilities for transformative action. It is marked by the intersections of people's trajectories and projects. Conscientisation involves becoming aware, but is not restricted to

awareness alone. It only makes sense from the moment it informs action in the world and change (Freire, 1975).

Latin American contexts (1960s to 1980s)

In the Latin American context from the 1960s to the 1980s, several influential thinkers developed key educational and psychological concepts. Paulo Freire introduced the ideas of conscientisation and critical consciousness as the foundation of his educational project, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, in the early 1970s in Brazil (Freire, 1970; 1974; 1975). In the 1980s, Ignacio Martín-Baró proposed the concepts of praxis and de-alienation, which are similar to Freire's ideas of critical consciousness and conscientisation, as part of his psychological framework known as *Liberation Psychology* in El Salvador (Martín-Baró, 1988, 1994). Additionally, Rodolfo Bohoslavsky, drawing inspiration from the social psychoanalysis of Enrique Pichón-Rivière and José Bleger (Tubert-Oaklander & Tubert, 2004), developed the concepts of consciousness and alienation in his career counselling initiative named as *Clinical-Social Strategy* in the 1970s in Argentina (Bohoslavsky, 1977, 1983; Ribeiro et al., 2015).

Despite the distinct contexts of Argentina, Brazil, and El Salvador, a common thread connects these countries. That supports the theoretical and practical development of these three authors, Bohoslavsky, Freire, and Martín-Baró, thereby creating a shared conceptual foundation (Diaz Genis, 2004).

In *political terms*, the three countries experienced totalitarian and undemocratic governments characterised by military dictatorships that generated political instability and hindered the establishment of democratic systems. Centralised power remained firmly in the hands of the government, and there were significant limitations on freedom of expression and political organisation. This environment led to human rights violations and the repression of political and social opposition, including the persecution of opponents amid the rise of left-wing movements and the struggle for social change.

Thinkers such as Bohoslavsky, Freire, and Martín-Baró contributed to the body of knowledge and professional practices aimed at promoting democratisation, social justice, and rights advocacy.

Economically, the region faced crises marked by rising inflation that resulted in significant foreign debt. Additionally, there was deindustrialisation, with a focus on the primary sector and a heavy reliance on agriculture. A large segment of the population experienced extreme poverty due to income concentration, particularly affecting the working class.

Socially, poverty, inequality, violence, and impunity dominated the situation, which fuelled cultural and protest movements. These movements sought changes in habits and behaviours, including both armed and peaceful political efforts aimed at restoring democracy and ensuring fundamental human rights.

The concepts of conscientisation and critical consciousness emerged in response to the oppressive realities of state violence, poverty, and repression, shaping their ontological, epistemological, and ethical-political foundations. There was a pressing need to develop knowledge and practices that would confront the classist, authoritarian, exclusionary, and

inequality-generating contexts that influenced people's lives. Consequently, this conceptual construction began in the social sphere, extended into academia, and eventually returned to social contexts.

In fields such as education, psychology, and career guidance and counselling, there is a tendency to overlook the socio-economic and cultural factors at play. Additionally, they uncritically adopt concepts and practices from different contexts. That became a pattern commonly observed in Latin America (González Bello & Ledezma, 2009). Thinkers like Bohoslavsky, Freire, and Martín-Baró aimed to create alternative approaches, but their proposals were often repressed, hidden, or delegitimised, whether directly or indirectly. Paulo Freire went into exile from Brazil, and Ignacio Martín-Baró was murdered by the government. Meanwhile, Rodolfo Bohoslavsky's ideas were rooted in psychoanalysis and lacked a perceived subversive or revolutionary power, particularly evident in his first book (Bohoslavsky, 1977), which became his most recognised work. In his second post-mortem book (Bohoslavsky, 1983), he brings a transformative power, but which, unfortunately, became an unfinished work because of his premature death at the age of 33 due to health problems in April 1977.

Critical consciousness and conscientisation

Inspiration from education

Freire (1970) views education as a political act aimed at liberating people from oppression and injustice. We will apply the author's insights, particularly in the context of popular education, as we believe they offer valuable elements for considering career guidance and counselling.

According to Freire (1970), both men and women are social and historical human beings shaped by their relationships with the world. That means they not only live in a society but also actively participate in and influence the reality around them, thereby transforming it. Therefore, we cannot consider people and society separately; there is no abstract person independent of the social structure, nor is there a society that can exist without the human beings who create and sustain it. Historicity and consciousness characterise human beings, which means they can reflect on their reality and themselves, gaining awareness of what their existence and actions in the world entail. This relationship with time encompasses three dimensions: the present, the past, and the future. Consequently, people are subjects of praxis, agents who act in the world, creating a culture and driving transformation. Human action is reflective and, as a result, critical. True critical reflection occurs only within praxis and is a praxis indeed.

Learning and working as core actions

For Freire (1970, 1975), learning involves taking critical ownership of the concrete situation in which one lives. Thus, learning and consciousness go hand in hand. The author takes culture and working as fundamental elements for the development of the learning process. In practice, it is less a question of discussing the history and different meanings of these concepts than of giving those who learn a place as subjects of their learning process and history. Subject, too, to the transformation of their daily reality and the world in which they live. The proposal is that students perceive themselves as co-creators of culture.

Work, therefore, has a fundamental place in this debate since it is through working that people act in the world - and, in this action, they also transform themselves. Culture is what people add to the world because of humans acting and working in their endeavour to create and recreate according to their needs (Freire, 1974).

'I know now that I am educated' (Freire, 2001, p. 144), said an elderly peasant emphatically. And when asked why he now knew he was cultured, he replied with the same emphasis: 'Because I work, and, by working, I transform the world' (Freire, 2001, p. 145).

Thus, work, understood in its ontological and historical dimension, emerges as a humanising and transforming activity (Freire, 1970, 1975). However, alienation intervenes as a process that negatively impacts the recognition of oneself as a historical subject, causing workers not to recognise themselves as responsible for the product that was the fruit of their activity. The role of the educator is to provoke curiosity in students about the context, creating room for problematisation and new ways of understanding social reality. Freire (1996) points to the need to break with the individualistic and competitive ideals characteristic of neoliberal thinking, which place the responsibility for the precarious and oppressive situation in which they find themselves onto the oppressed.

Self-devaluation, conscientisation and critical consciousness

In this sense, an important concept worked on by the author is self-devaluation. This notion is typical of alienation and concerns the introjection that oppressed people make of the oppressors' view of them. That results in feelings of incapacity and inferiority, which is why they can devalue their knowledge. It also results in the personal attribution of responsibility for domination. By recognising that they host conceptions of the oppressor in their consciousness, it is possible, through conscientisation, to act towards liberation.

In this context, critical consciousness is essential. It involves understanding the causal relationships between phenomena and seeking to unveil and demystify reality. Additionally, a thorough integration with social reality characterises it. The concept of critical consciousness challenges and interrogates the fatalistic view of the world, which perceives social reality as something external and, therefore, resistant to any possibility of transformation (Freire, 1974).

Freire (1996, p. 26) emphasises the importance of highlighting the oppressed and their journey towards emancipation, offering a strong critique of what he terms 'neoliberal fatalism', the belief that 'there is no alternative'. However, he argues that history is not fixed; instead, it is a space of possibilities rather than deterministic factors. This situation prevents people from becoming agents of their lives.

In this deterministic perspective, there is no room for decisions. If tomorrow merely continues what today has established, there is no space for choice, only a forced acceptance of what already exists and what is to come. The temporal dimension signifies that the unfinished state is an ontological condition of social beings, suggesting that the future should be viewed as a process and a problem rather than a fixed and predetermined state (Freire, 1970). By reflecting on themselves and the world, human beings can perceive themselves as subjects of inquiry, allowing them to question their existence and to acknowledge what they do not know. This consciousness can lead them to seek new questions and answers.

Furthermore, it emphasises the necessity for the oppressed to discover and assert themselves as active subjects of their historical destiny, moving beyond the limitations imposed by a culture of domination and processes of marginalisation. As Freire (1970, p. 10) states, 'conscientisation is not just knowledge or recognition, but choice, decision, commitment'.

It is essential to differentiate between conditioning and determination. While macro-social structures condition people's experiences, they do not determine them. This distinction highlights the potential for transforming these structures, which requires a process of conscientisation. People, 'being aware of themselves and their surroundings, live in a dialectical relationship between their conditioning and their freedom' (Freire, 1970, p. 125). Therefore, it is not the state of being unfinished itself that is significant, but rather the act of recognising this unfinishedness. This recognition creates opportunities for people to construct new ways of being, driving them to transcend their conditioning.

According to Freire (1975), consciousness evolves through distinct stages, each reflecting varying degrees of understanding of reality. Conscientisation is an ongoing process that moves people from naivety to critical consciousness. This journey leads to the realisation that the circumstances people face are not solely dependent on them but influenced by a context of oppression and inequality. Importantly, this realisation is just one aspect of the journey, which also includes an understanding of the historical context, recognising that these conditions are not absolute or unchangeable, and the commitment to taking potent actions to transform reality. Freire (1975) emphasises that the process of conscientisation includes recognising and denouncing oppression, as well as envisioning a utopia. It refers to a distinct reality apart from the existing one and can be co-created by social actors. Becoming aware means taking ownership of one's situation and actively working toward its transformation.

Conscientisation and praxis

The concept of praxis is vital for overcoming oppression. For Freire (1975), praxis represents the dialectical unity of theory and practice, encompassing both action and reflection. It is not merely about practice or theoretical/intellectual contemplation but instead occurs in the dynamic interplay between these two aspects.

Simply listening to a liberating discourse does not automatically lead to a deeper understanding of reality or a commitment to actions aimed at achieving liberation. It is the relationship between the unveiling of oppressive reality and critical insertion into reality that implies transformative praxis. Action and reflection are conceived as a unity that must not be dichotomised.

Conscientisation, therefore, is the process that offers people opportunities to know themselves by reflecting on their existence. It aims to critically integrate people in the transformative action of reality by implying, on the one hand, the unveiling of the oppressive reality and, on the other, action to change it.

The production of knowledge is always a continuous struggle between liberation and adaptation to oppressive logic. In this sense, Freire (1975) distinguishes between integration and accommodation to reality.

Accommodation implies the person adjusting to external prescriptions that are alien to him or her. It is the mark of a person as an object, not a subject; therefore, it is also the mark of dehumanisation. From this position, it is not possible to recognise oneself as capable of promoting changes in concrete reality. All that remains is to change oneself to adapt, to accommodate oneself to an inexorable reality. Integration, on the other hand, involves adjustment and transformation, which includes a critical dimension and the possibility of taking a position and making choices along the way. The subject integrates, ceasing to be an object. Taking the place of the subject implies becoming aware of one's humanity and acting in the world toward transforming situations of oppression (Osowski, 2018).

This process involves both personal and collective dimensions. It entails becoming aware of the world in which you live in an engaged manner and understanding yourself relating to that world. Critical consciousness is not simply an individual capacity; it is a dialogical result stemming from connections with both the world and other people. The process of conscientisation relies on others to initiate it.

Conscientisation refers to a 'presence that has the power to present; it is not representation, but a condition of presentation' (Freire, 1970, p. 14). This process is inherently collective; it does not occur in isolation from others. On the contrary, it is a space for encounter, a relational construction of consciousness.

Communication arises from the tension between self-consciousness and the consciousness of others. In other words, consciousness emerges through the dynamic of opposition generated during these intersubjective encounters.

Conscientisation refers to a process of critically examining the relationship between consciousness and the world. This critical consciousness is essential for people to embrace their commitment to the social and historical context in which they exist. In the pursuit of knowledge, subjects often find themselves committed to social reality, which is a commitment intricately linked to meaningful human praxis. Through conscientisation, subjects acknowledge their historical responsibilities in the continuous process of shaping the world and, in turn, reshaping themselves (Freitas, 2018, p. 105).

Considering that the process of conscientisation addresses profound concerns about social reality, questions arise regarding its potential problems or risks. Is it worthwhile to confront people with the inequalities of material reality? When faced with a harsh truth, might individuals succumb to paralysis or even destructive fanaticism?

According to Freire (1970), if conscientisation evokes dissatisfaction, it is due to the oppressive nature of social reality. Conscientisation, in turn, enables individuals to engage in the historical process as subjects rather than mere objects.

Praxis and the process of de-alienation

Inspiration from psychology

Martín-Baró (1988) states 'all knowledge and doing are conditioned by the circumstances in which they occur and by the social forces that produce them' (p. 557). Thus, the foundation for any practice should be grounded, which must always be viewed as a contextualised practice.

It is crucial that these practices 'be oriented towards and based on reality' (1994, p. 10) within an epistemological framework that begins and ends with reality. If we want science to 'make a significant contribution...we have to redesign our theoretical and practical tools but redesign them from the standpoint of our own people: from their sufferings, their aspirations, and their struggles' (1994, p. 23). To do this, three elements are necessary: 'a new horizon, a new epistemology, and a new praxis' (1994, p. 26).

Praxis and the process of de-alienation

The three reasons that establish reality as the cornerstone of knowledge and practices: first, practices should be oriented towards everyday life and situated in the daily interactions of people's concrete relationships, illustrating the importance of daily life in scientific inquiry; second, reality emphasises the historical nature of people and communities; and third, it possesses an emotional quality that fosters critical thinking.

Ultimately, this perspective advocates for an epistemology that arises from the people, not for them, but from them. Changes cannot be made from our offices; they must come from a praxis that is committed to the people. 'All knowledge and practices are conditioned by the circumstances in which they occur and by the social forces that produce them' (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 257).

For a new way of producing knowledge,

it is not enough to place ourselves in the perspective of the people; it is necessary to involve ourselves in a new praxis, an activity of transforming reality that will let us know not only about what is but also about what is not, and by which we may try to orient ourselves toward what ought to be (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 28-29).

De-alienation and the knowledge production

Martín-Baró (1988) conceives the idea of a process of de-alienation as 'the recovery of personal and social consciousness that requires, firstly, a change in the nature of social relations, such as that sought by the process of consciousness proposed by Freire (1970)' (p. 567). 'Consciousness is the knowing or not knowing of self, through the world and through others, with praxis coming before mental knowledge' (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 38). The belief that we should overcome alienation without a concomitant change in the structures of social exploitation is a dangerous form of scientific idealism.

It, therefore, proposes that all production of knowledge and practices should have four conditions to be a transformative work: (1) It must be conducted in an interdisciplinary way; (2) It must be based on a clear axiological and political option; (3) It must be practical, responding to people's issues and disorders that require immediate intervention; and (4) It must critically analyse the experience and develop a theorisation about it. These conditions would define the praxis of Martín-Baró's proposal (1988, 1994).

Consciousness and alienation

According to Bohoslavsky (1983), people do not achieve fulfilment in an unfulfilled country, which highlights the impossibility of considering personal projects – fundamental to career counselling – detached from collective projects.

In this way, the author emphasises the relationships between people and society, criticising the lack of importance given to structural issues in career guidance and counselling debates. The social aspect is seen above all as a backdrop in which the plot of social relations takes place, instead of being treated as an essential part of these same relations. The author made this criticism in the 1970s, and to some extent, it remains relevant, as Hooley et al. (2021) and Ribeiro (2021) have highlighted.

For Bohoslavsky (1983), context and structure formed the social reality. In the first case, it is the context in which people make choices, offering challenges and possibilities in the realisation of personal and collective projects. In the second, it refers to the broader social structure, which encompasses this context but is not restricted to it.

This scenario challenges career counselling, inviting a positioning that is, above all, political. Hence, the importance of 'constructing models that reveal the articulation between the social system imposed on men and the subjects that support it, maintain it, transmit it, but who – it is important to consider – also transform it' (p. 15).

The concepts of freedom of choice and autonomy are revealed to the author as misleading and ideologically driven, serving not to unveil reality but to obscure it, thereby preserving the status quo. Practitioners must pay attention to this construct, as ignoring the context in which choices are made can have significant consequences.

From this perspective, it becomes evident that personal fulfilment cannot be achieved without considering the underlying social structure.

As experts in matters of choice, we must reflect not only on what humanity is but also on what it has the potential to become. Considering freedom as a theoretical problem, we should question the type of freedom we are discussing, whether it is a metaphysical, context-free freedom, or a historically situated one, and what kind of freedom we truly advocate for (Bohoslavsky, 1977, XXII).

Alienation and identity crisis

Bohoslavsky (1983) revives the Marxist concept of alienation, emphasising that accounts from clients support his observations, which remain relevant today. Reports describe feelings of externalisation about the work performed as if it belonged to someone else. Additionally, there is a sense of meaninglessness in work, along with a lack of fulfilment and social contribution.

Work is viewed not as an intrinsic need but to satisfy other needs. Such statements reflect the experience of an alienated individual, who 'sees, behind the collapse of his illusory vocational images, the real conditions of production in capitalist society' (p. 49).

Bohoslavsky (1983), inspired by Marx, argues that the capitalist production system inherently leads to chronic alienation. He notes that it is not possible to eliminate this alienation through a career guidance and counselling intervention. However, it is important to explore the moments when alienation becomes an acute crisis when the chronic aspects of alienation emerge in consciousness.

The acute crisis of alienation is characterised by a profound sense of loss of meaning and estrangement in work or study life, as well as uncertainty about the future. This loss reveals what can be described as a pseudo-meaning, exposing fractures in the previously defensive system of a person, which relied on a working identity that seemed to harmonise with the social context.

During this crisis, the identity becomes unable to fulfil its functions due to a lack of autonomy in confronting alienated work and the inherent contradictions it involves. It is important to note that this crisis does not automatically lead to consciousness; in fact, it is often the absence of consciousness that intensifies the crisis.

While the crisis can create opportunities for greater consciousness, it can also strengthen the person's defensive mechanisms. The direction taken at this critical juncture is influenced by the practitioner, who must remain mindful of their role in the process and reflect on their own experiences of alienation.

The working identity allies the dominant ideological apparatus to protect the person from conflict with part of the social contradictions. However, for this to occur, a partial or even false working identity is necessary, which becomes possible through processes of denial, rationalisation, and ideologisation. An identity crisis occurs when this alliance is no longer able to protect the person. Due to a series of social issues, the crisis occurs when there is a 'clash between biography and history' (Bohoslavsky, 1983, p. 54).

The shock characterises the crisis as far as it brings to light the contradictions of the system that were not previously seen as problematic for the subject. Educational institutions and the family play a key role since these two systems act to conform the working identity to the ideology.

For people to feel integrated and adapted to the social context, a high degree of lack of consciousness is required: a) of the contextual and structural elements that shape the world of work itself, in a broader sense, and the development of a specific job; b) of the connections between work, the productive system and the teaching/educational systems.

Thus, Bohoslavsky (1983) understands that the crisis of alienation occurs not due to the lack of integration with the context but, on the contrary, because of the person becoming aware of the type of integration they have been making with their context.

Career counselling and the importance of consciousness

Acknowledging the significance of social structures does not imply that there are no fractures or opportunities for action. To truly experience freedom and autonomy, both of which are relative, consciousness is essential. Within this social context, career guidance and counselling inherently possess a political dimension. If the practitioner chooses to ignore the contradictions within the social system, they perpetuate the status quo. Therefore, it becomes crucial to reveal the various dimensions and factors that influence personal choices during the guidance and counselling process.

Consequently, career guidance and counselling must involve a consciousness of the determinants that contribute to the formation of working identity. Otherwise, it risks becoming an alienated practice that, rather than genuinely promoting the idea of freedom

of choice and autonomy, merely fits people into predefined roles while neglecting the social influences and complexities that play in their decision-making processes.

Bohoslavsky (1983) identifies two key elements for developing this consciousness: first, self-consciousness as a subject, and second, an understanding of the social and structural factors that shape people and societies.

The practitioner's role is linked to social deconditioning, which necessitates a critical examination of theories, values, and assumptions. Therefore, recognising the alienation that characterises the relationship with work under capitalism is crucial.

Career guidance and counselling involve navigating between personal aspirations and the influence of social structures. While practitioner cannot eliminate alienation, they can take initiative-taking steps to address potential crises of alienation. That requires a willingness to question rather than accommodate existing conditions, as well as helping the client to align their personal goals with broader social objectives.

Possible discussions: The need for contextualisation

Critical consciousness and conscientisation, concepts introduced by Freire in 1970 and 1975, emerged from Latin American contexts where a sizeable portion of the population was advocating for transformative changes. These changes primarily focused on increasing access to fundamental rights, including the right to life and dignified work. As such, these concepts emphasise reality as both a starting point and an endpoint, aiming for understanding and changing. That is why they are considered psychosocial and political concepts (Leong & Pearce, 2011; Ribeiro, 2021; Sultana, 2018).

These ideas were born from experiences of classism, authoritarianism, exclusion, and inequality, which have profoundly shaped people's lives and influenced possibilities for future change. Consequently, critical consciousness and conscientisation are deeply embedded in their contexts and carry the sociocultural and historical influences specific to those settings.

When developed contexts in the Global North import concepts such as critical consciousness and conscientisation, they must be analysed and reconstructed for relevance and coherence as the original situations are significantly different.

Considering context

First, it is essential to understand and explain the specifics, dynamics, and demands of the contexts in which these rights will be applied as both theoretical and practical foundations.

Second, it is essential to re-signify these concepts to understand their meaning in each context to evaluate their effectiveness.

Third, these concepts originate from collectivist settings, which assume that projects are always co-constructed. Therefore, they need to be re-examined to serve as a conceptual basis in more individualistic contexts. If treated merely as individual capacities, they risk losing their transformative power.

Fourth, these concepts arise from contexts marked by inequalities and ongoing crises, which necessitate an analysis of how to build critical consciousness in more stable contexts. They were constructed for unstable and unequal circumstances, requiring reconstruction to function in more equitable contexts, mainly from Global North, when compared to the average of Southern contexts in terms of financial status, security, stability, and social protection in general.

Finally, conscientisation opportunities in each context is a crucial factor in evaluating the power of these concepts, which bridge their scientific dimensions with their political implications.

One way to illustrate the entire argument is to analyse two examples of the use of conscientisation and critical consciousness in career guidance and counselling in both the Global North and the Global South.

Cadenas and McWhirter (2022) say that the use of the concepts of conscientisation and critical consciousness in the field of career guidance and counselling began 20 years ago. They pointed to the need for improvements, including the importance of contextualisation to empower the impact of these concepts on theories and practices in the Global North – the discussion proposed here. In much research, critical consciousness resembles an individual competence that can be measured in a similar way to other competencies (e.g., self-efficacy and career adaptability). We can say that this bears the mark of more individualistic cultures.

As discussed, conscientisation is a process of developing critical consciousness, but it depends on the relationship with context and others, as well as possibilities of transforming the current situation.

It is not a matter of gradation based on something expected, since what is expected depends on the relational context in which one lives and is not given a priori, just as it is not possible to anticipate the conditions for its development. In other words, the product (critical consciousness) is dependent on the process (conscientisation) that does not exist outside the dialogical relationship, as Freire (2001) advocates.

Thus, the inclusion of complementary strategies for the procedural construction of critical consciousness is necessary, as pointed out by Cadenas and McWhirter (2022) and Watts et al. (2011), since the result of any measurement is questionable or insufficient to understand and promote conscientisation.

The Global South, as the context in which these concepts were forged, has a collectivistic cultural tradition and more frequently employs communitarian and group strategies in its career guidance and counselling practices, enhancing the consciousness-raising process, as reflections, projects, and actions are collectively generated and co-constructed (González Bello & Ledezma, 2009; Ribeiro, 2021).

These strategies can be used in any context; however, in the Global North, they would encounter more resistance and difficulty due to a more individualistic mindset. Cadenas and McWhirter (2022) and Watts et al. (2011) suggest that group discussions and communitarian actions improve critical consciousness, although analysing the barriers and potential for their implementation is necessary.

Conclusion

Building a bridge with a contemporary emerging movement in career guidance and counselling, generically named green guidance by Plant (2015), we can say that conscientisation should be at the basis of any strategy that includes sustainability and dignified work as pillars for its practices. In conclusion, the concepts of critical consciousness and conscientisation are cornerstones for global career guidance and counselling that aim to foster social justice and rights advocacy. They contribute to a deeper understanding of lived experiences and facilitate the development of both personal and collective actions for transformative change.

Theorising in this area should be linked to a critical practice that challenges complacency and adaptation, fostering an environment where people can see themselves as agents of social change. To achieve this, we emphasise the importance of contextualising these concepts for meaningful conceptual and political refinement, as their concrete use requires a solid underlying framework.

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