

Chapter 14

Vulnerable Youth in Argentina: Contributions to the Achievement of Sustainable Life Paths and Decent Social Insertions. Research and Practices



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14.1 Introduction

Within the framework of the sustainable development agenda, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] has set goals for 2030 to guide proposals in the following areas, among others: eradicate poverty, protect the planet, ensure prosperity for all and create the conditions for decent work.

This book aims to address the following question: how can interventions in guidance and counseling accompany the development of people's life paths, considering their institutional and community insertions, while keeping the principles established by UNESCO in mind which involve the achievement of sustainable development and creation of decent work?

To answer this question, we consider it necessary to take into account the following two issues:

On the one hand, given the emergence of new social situations and challenges for guidance and counseling, traditional intervention models are considered insufficient and in some cases inadequate. Standardized responses and individualistic approaches are limited and ineffective in addressing the problems faced by diverse populations in the context of rising inequalities and increasingly precarious life situations.

We believe that in order to improve the quality of guidance and counseling interventions which would lead to a more just society, it is necessary to identify these groups, their needs and specificities. In this sense, our research and interventions focus on deepening our reflection on the realities of people exposed to situations of

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social vulnerability, mainly those who present greater difficulties in shaping their lives, building life paths and managing to enjoy sustainable lives by getting decent jobs.

Guidance and counseling responses require critical analysis and a discussion that promotes the reconfiguration of theoretical models and interventions, assuming it is necessary to overcome individual approaches. Consequently, we need systemic approaches that engage other social actors and institutions to help develop and uphold the changes proposed.

On the other hand, there is a certain tension between the universal notion of *decent work* and its application in a determined context, which depends on the specific situation each country is experiencing. What specific questions could arise about this notion in Argentina? How can this aspirational statement connect with the deep inequalities and difficulties as regards certain working situations faced by some social groups? Also, which actors are, or should be, involved in the implementation of strategies that guarantee decent work, where certain conditions are ensured such as freedom, equality, security and human dignity? Finally, how can guidance and counseling in our environment contribute to meeting the goals set by UNESCO?

In this chapter we develop these issues by addressing the following points. Firstly, we will refer to the concept of decent work developed by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 1999) and adopted by the international community. Secondly, we will discuss the need to recognize the particularities of different cultures, regions and countries, focusing on the case of Argentina. Thirdly, in order to provide answers to the question that inspires this book, we will follow the line of life design (Nota & Rossier, 2015; Savickas et al., 2009) interventions considering the results of our research and interventions.

We will present four discursive forms (Sautu, 2004) that we were able to create, in order to understand the ways in which young vulnerable individuals construct their identity and the future. Finally, we will propose possible points of action and reflections on the subjects addressed, strengthening the idea that only the actions capable of involving different social actors will help us get closer to achieving social justice.

14.2 The Concept of Decent Work and the Contributing Role of Psychology

The International Labour Organization defines decent work as productive and fairly paid work exercised in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity (ILO, 1999). From the beginning, the construct includes objective and macro-economic variables such as access to work and labor rights, adequate economic remuneration, social protection, health insurance as well as and health and safety measures to ensure a proper working environment, sufficient leisure time and the possibility of associating with other workers to defend labor rights, among others. Disciplines such as law, economics and sociology have contributed ideas and knowledge to this construct.

However, two major aspects are put into play when analyzing the conditions for access to decent work. It is necessary to guarantee both the right to work and observe workers' rights while ensuring adequate working conditions. Currently, both of these aspects are in tension. The main problem is the existence of unemployment as a structural characteristic in the labor market, which fuels the process of inequality and social exclusion.

The other problem is related to the deterioration of working conditions, labor flexibilization, segmentation and employment instability among others, all of which generate low-quality and insignificant work experiences. This state of affairs allows us to measure the great challenge of securing decent work.

Additionally, in recent years a psychological perspective has extended the scope and understanding of this category of decent work (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016). From this approach, work is considered decent if it contributes to human fulfillment and general well-being as well as provides the means to satisfy three primary human needs: the need for survival, social connection and self-determination (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Moreover, work is also considered decent if it allows for different roles to be played, the acquisition of knowledge, development of skills, identity building and quality social inclusion. Furthermore, the way in which people give meaning to their experiences at work has a strong impact on the development of their life paths and social inclusion.

Understanding the role of work in people's lives has been one of the key aspects of guidance and counseling psychology theories throughout time (Blustein, 2008; Savickas & Baker, 2005).

From the beginning of the discipline, academics have been focused on analyzing and defining the specific relationships people have with their working environment. Broadly speaking, up until 1950 this was focused on the factors in play in choosing an occupation and professional success (Duarte, 2015), after which came the incorporation of the idea of work associated with career development in relation to other contexts in the life span (Guichard, 2015; Super, 1980).

However, these traditional theories and practices, which are associated with career development, have been mainly focused on a reduced number of groups, fundamentally those that have a certain amount of self-determination (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & De Voy, 2008), ignoring the experiences of others who have been traditionally neglected from discussions about careers.

One theory of guidance and counseling, which is inclusive and supported in the precepts of social justice, should include the experiences of those groups who are set aside: women, people of color and those from low social classes, all of whom experience different situations of vulnerability (Aisenson et al., 2012, 2014, 2015; Blustein, Mc Whirter, & Perry, 2005; Richardson, 2012).

Changes in the labor market are undeniable, which are products of the new social, technical and economic paradigms. However, these changes did not occur in the same way nor did they have the same consequences in the different regions of the planet.

As regards fulfilling UNESCO's proposed objectives we consider it necessary that the theories and practices be framed in the specific contexts in which the inter-

ventions are made. It is therefore necessary to promote comprehensive and transversal policies, as well as educational, employment and guidance interventions that allow for equal work and social inclusion. Our practice and research, as a matter of priority, focuses on groups of individuals with vulnerable basic rights who have been marginalized and not had the opportunity to completely develop as human beings, since they are the ones least likely to reach the standards of decent work.

14.3 Working Conditions in Argentina

Argentina has a population that exceeds 43 million. At present, the data from official statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos [INDEC], 2017a) is discouraging. In the second half of 2016, 6.3% of the population and 4.8% of households were found to be destitute, with income not high enough to reach a minimum threshold for nutritional needs. Almost a third of the population of our country, 23.1% of households, is in poverty, those whose income is insufficient to purchase, through goods and services, a set of food and non-food necessities considered essential (clothing, transport, education and health among others).

Furthermore, the job market in Argentina is complex. Recent official data (INDEC, 2017b) indicates that the unemployment rate has reached 7.6%. Moreover, the youth unemployment rate is 14.8% and the female population is even further affected (19.7%). On the other hand, those who can get a job do not have the same conditions nor same rights. The labor market is segmented into two different circuits, formal and informal, with little or no possibility of movement between the two (Neffa, 2003).

Over the past 30 years, informal work has been one of the main problems the labor market has faced and its negative trend only receded in 2006, after the national government included the principles of decent work in the agenda through the Department of Labor, Employment and Social Security (Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad social, 2013).

Workers in the informal sector have poor quality jobs, low wages, long working hours, lack of access to training opportunities and hardly any access to the legal and protective social system. These conditions place both the workers and their families in a vulnerable situation in terms of work and income.

It is not possible to specify how many people are in this situation, but some studies estimate that more than a third of dependent workers are not properly registered. For young people the situation is even more serious, since it has been found that 59% of young people are unregistered workers (Bertranou & Casanova, 2015).

In 2016, as a result of the economic crisis and new national government, more than 5000 companies have closed, which has led to an increased number of job losses in both formal and informal sectors. This situation becomes meaningful in an atmosphere where social actors create meanings about the labor market as well as its possibilities of labor and social insertion.

A recent study (Centro de Estudios del Trabajo y el Desarrollo. Universidad Nacional de San Martín [UNSAM], 2017) shows that 60.5% of respondents perceive reduced opportunities to get a job compared to the previous year, a situation getting worse for the unemployed. In addition, this report argues that job uncertainty has grown, mostly among employees, women and especially the youthful population. Due to fear of losing their current jobs and not being able to find another position, many people accept working conditions that are far from what can be defined as decent.

14.4 Youth in Argentina: Job Insecurity and Unemployment

For the most vulnerable groups of young people, the transition to work occurs earlier and under more precarious conditions. Many young people who cannot complete high school, an essential requirement in our country which allows access to the formal sector of the labor market, are generally compelled to work in the informal sector of the economy. However, even those who complete their studies recognize the difficulties of becoming part of the formal sector of the labor market.

In this context, we could say that they are the group with the greatest deficit in securing decent work (ILO, 2002). Moreover, many young people in socially vulnerable situations construct their understanding of work related to family contexts, where relatives have not had positive, valued and quality jobs over the course of two generations. Their day-to-day survival has depended on temporary jobs called “changas”, social plans and also, in some cases, illegal activities. This situation has a negative impact on shaping one’s identity, in developing resources to be included in the sphere of work and building meaningful life paths; it hence affects the ability to secure decent work.

Since young people make up one of the groups with the most precarious working conditions, it is legitimate to ask ourselves: what do these precarious jobs mean to them? What impact do precarious jobs and unemployment have on their identity? Where do these experiences rank in their lives?

For some groups of young people, job insecurity results in a transition towards stabilization, a temporary condition, whilst training in another area. For others, who usually come from vulnerable social sectors and families with less economic resources, who only have access to lower quality educational circuits, this situation can become a permanent condition in terms of their relationship with the labor market (Nicole-Drancourt, 1994). This condition generates perceptions of little change, naturalizing this situation as the “way of working” and limiting aspirations.

From a psychological standpoint, a broad line of research has provided data that has been used to explain the difference between the two situations from the different groups described above, highlighting certain individual aspects. As a result, concepts such as self-efficiency, interests, self-concept and personality, among others, have become relevant to describe the development of individual careers, assuming it is

the responsibility of people to make a proper use of their personal characteristics and resources in order to succeed in the labor market.

However, the difference between one situation and another cannot be explained only from individual aspects. From a contextual perspective, social inequalities result in an unequal cultural and economic capital which implies less access to resources of all kinds. This perspective is a key factor in understanding, conceptualizing and intervening in these issues. Not all of us started the race of life at the same starting point; some did so better equipped and after much more training than others (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012).

14.5 The Challenges of Guidance and Counseling in the Current Context

Our framework, the preventive-communitarian approach (Aisenson, 2002, 2006) aims to promote the insertion of vulnerable segments of society in decent and sustainable jobs, attempting to expand their horizon of opportunities.

In social, economic and working contexts within current globalized societies, the aspiration of getting decent work remains an essential objective, although it is difficult to achieve at times. Subjective strategies and personal life paths become interfered with due to the tension present among a myriad of different discourses. The imperative of building oneself, achieving satisfactory insertions and obtaining a social status is confronted with the real opportunities offered by the social world. In the world of work there is, without doubt, an expression of this tension.

Nowadays, professional and personal identities can no longer be built based on stable and durable life paths, but have to go through constant identity configurations and reconfigurations. This is mainly due to factors such as increased uncertainty and unstable conditions in daily life, which characterize social and individual projections in the future (Aisenson, 2006).

Also, “in a changing world which is out of control, there is no other point of support than the individual’s own effort to transform life experiences by building him/herself to become an actor” (Touraine, 2000, p. 28). In this context, the institutions that regulate social life impose an individualistic principle of personal self-realization. The social mandate places the subject as the author, with the duty to form a life plan and be responsible for his or her own personal as well as professional success or failure.

The emergence of new subjectivities takes place at a time when the twentieth century’s great driving forces for social mobility, employment and education, have begun to tremble and fail (Jacinto, 2016). For this reason, interventions and public policies on education and employment inclusion increasingly need the development of individualization processes, through the instrumentation of “policies of subjectivity” (Tedesco, 2008).

Self-construction has been transformed into a social mandate. It became a strong imperative, necessary for access to social recognition and related to the possibility

of creating oneself and expressing personal expectations and projects (Giddens, 1991). Incorporation into social life requires people to have a speech about themselves that articulates three temporalities, subjective, intersubjective and objective, which express their abilities and projects (Dubar, 2002). If they succeed, they will be able to build a positive self-esteem, integrate with others and participate in public life, mainly through employment and the full exercise of citizenship.

In this sense, people who can develop a subjective process, such as creating, owning and telling their own life story, will be able to value their achievements as well as aspire for and project more decent and hopeful conditions for the future. By taking advantage of their learning and creating better conditions, they will be better able to secure decent work and integrated social inclusion.

Thinking about the future has also become an imperative. Having a life project is considered an indicator of well-being and health while, in subjective terms, it is indispensable to face the uncertainties of the complex context (Aisenson et al., 2014). Developing a life project involves a subjective process. It requires the possibility of anticipating a valued and significant place in the world and the ability to generate changes and imagine new inclusions.

However, the need to construct projects, aligned with certain models considered socially legitimated, could have prescriptive and normative effects, particularly in socially vulnerable populations. Their life paths are marked by deprivation, violence, material and affective deficits, lack of opportunities, family fractures, discontinued or failed educational paths, precarious and insecure working conditions, social stigmatization and limited access to citizens' rights (Aisenson et al., 2014, 2015; Bailac, Virgili, Valenzuela, Aisenson, & Legaspi, 2015; Czerniuk, 2016; Legaspi et al. 2011; Valenzuela & Aisenson, 2016).

As pointed out by Aulagnier (2015), reflexive historicism is essential for having subjective processes and enables an individual to put him/herself into perspective. People visualize their lives according to their "memory reserve": the experiential, affective and cognitive learning in interaction with others, incorporated as of early childhood that occurs within the context of everyday experiences, in different institutions and community areas.

Due to what has been outlined above, we consider it vital to review and transform the guidance and counseling intervention models in the twenty-first century. From a contextual and constructionist perspective, we focus on narratives, life paths and particular meanings that the most vulnerable people construct about their lives and insertions. It is an absolute urgent priority to give visibility to these groups and achieve their inclusion in the social and academic agenda, in order for us to be able to analyze and approach their problem areas from our field.

The narrative about themselves enables the inscription of their own existence and individual life stories in a dynamic prospective, which allows for new selves, projects and transformed actions that can be imagined in the future. From the constructivist perspective, narrative mediation takes a central role due to its impact on the self-construction processes. This enables the construction of multiple pathways and feasibility of projects in different social and life contexts.

However, unequal living conditions have correlation with the representations of self and the appropriation of language resources. This also results in the unequal distribution in the ways they build coherent narratives about themselves, in relation to a socially acceptable narrative. As Ricoeur (2004) states, the approval of others acquires a leading role in different levels of society, since there is a struggle for recognition based on personal capacities. For this reason, it undermines social equality and perpetuates social exclusion and discrimination.

The life design theoretical model considers the use of theory important for understanding the phenomena and different circumstances of reality. At the same time, the analysis of reality becomes a source of new experiences that contribute to the construction of theories, with qualitative research methods the most appropriate for these developments (Aisenson et al., 2012; Duarte & Cardoso, 2015; Legaspi et al., 2011).

Taking these approaches into account, it is relevant to focus on groups that build their lives in contexts of discrimination and marginalization, who have little or no access to decent work. Qualitative research methods allow us to access their culture as well as the diversity and richness of their meanings while capturing the processes of self-construction. Finally, the outcomes allow us to design and produce valid and meaningful interventions.

14.6 Our Studies with Young Vulnerable Individuals

We seek to understand how vulnerable young people perceive their future, what meanings they attribute to it and how they construct themselves, considering the effects of their personal, family, social, educational and working paths.

We recognize that anticipating the future is more difficult when it comes to life paths marked by deprivation, lack of opportunities, educational deficit, precariousness and disaffiliation. Not only their past experiences but also the possibility of building and having future expectations place them in a more vulnerable situation in personal, social, educational and working aspects. This represents greater risks and difficulties in achieving sustainable inclusion, decent work and having the ability to build a valued identity.

In our research, we have studied young people at different moments in their life cycles and different situations of vulnerability: those with fragmented educational paths (between 15 and 18 years old), who are homeless (between 20 and 24 years old) and young offenders (between 16 and 18 years old).¹

The approach adopted was qualitative. The instruments of data collection were carried out through in-depth interviews (59 interviews) and discussion groups (21 groups). Narratives of particular life paths were considered in both cases, taking the

¹Extensive research results can be found in a large amount of articles. Concerning discontinuous educational trajectories and homeless experiences see Aisenson et al. (2015), Bailac et al. (2015) and Aisenson et al. (2013). Czerniuk's research (2016) concerns vulnerable adolescence and maternity while Valenzuela and Aisenson's studies (2016) explore vulnerable young individuals that are part of a social inclusion programme linked to music.

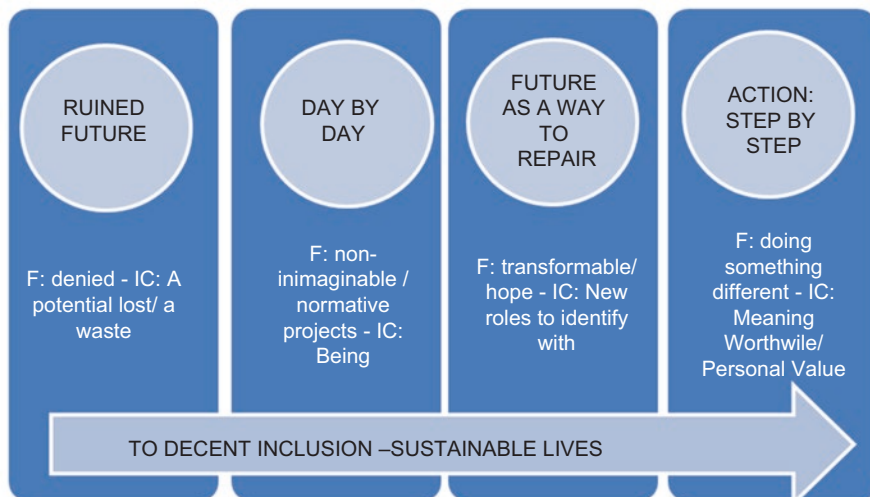


Fig. 14.1 Links Future- Identity in the discursive form. F means “future” and IC “identity construction”. The four discursive forms help in thinking and achieving sustainable life paths and getting decent jobs

structure of the story and its content into account (Berteaux, 2005), meaning the articulation with the processes of identity construction and anticipations for the future were sought.

The processing, analysis and interpretation of the information obtained considered narrative structure and argumentative strategies. Moreover, in relation to the content, life paths, ways in which aspects of a temporary nature were approached, social representations of study and work, social links and roles were analyzed (Wagner & Wodak, 2006).

Each of the stories was considered a unit of analysis, from which discursive forms of representation of the future emerged, understood as systematic thematic nuclei (Sautu, 2004). These are types of stories that can be related to several people and in turn can all be related to the same person.

Next, we present the four discursive ways of representation of the future that we have identified (Fig. 14.1).

The Ruined Future: Hopelessness

Within this category the future is discursively stated in potential form and signified as being ruined. It refers to a place and existence that will not occur. The narrative returns to that they wish to overcome, which in turn is denied in the story itself. In terms of identity construction, the future appears as wasted potential or missed opportunities.

What good is it that they offer you something now, when as a kid they didn't? Because **I could have been somebody else, because I was smart** ... Even today (...) They just left me lying there ... (M., male, 21).

Day by Day Life

Another way to represent the future is as non-existent, unimaginable, like something impossible to be thought. We understand this perspective as a strategy for the young to guard themselves from disenchantment and frustration, pursuant to their past experiences. The relationship with the future becomes stressful, creating uncertainty, frustration and fear. As a counterpart, a response focused on the present, day by day, becomes the brand. In terms of identity construction, this narrative links to a “being” form: “being me day by day”.

As I tell everyone about my future, **I do not think anything. I Live day by day**, twenty-four hours. I don't think anything about the future, because it has happened to me for several years, where thinking about the future made me never achieve anything. I prefer to live day by day, to see when the best one comes. (D., male, 24).

The stories within this discursive form express the representation of project and future as normative categories, linked to canonical and socially validated projects.

The Future as a Way to Repair Personal History

Family and personal history is considered unfortunate, adverse and dysfunctional. Experiences related to domestic violence and material deprivation are the most common scenarios reported, during which they often describe themselves as little defenseless children, exposed to vulnerable situations with a vivid sense of their own fragility and helplessness.

Nevertheless, within this discursive form, the future prospection links to hope and positive thinking, allowing greater responsibility and improving self value. There are three principal axes within this discursive form:

The future is an attempt to repair some harm, that seeks to transform these experiences:

...when I came here [to Buenos Aires] ... I didn't like being here [...] But since they brought me, I had to stay [...] I wanted to stay in Salta, because, as I grew up with my grandmother, **I wanted to stay with her**, but as my mom did not want that, I had to come [...] the teacher would always get angry at me because when I arrived I didn't want to do anything [...] perhaps I was depressed [...] because I was not with my grandmother [**my idea is**] **to return to Salta and stay there indefinitely** ...or until my grandmother and my grandfather are gone... and then, maybe... I do not know, perhaps return (N., male, 16)

One aspect in this category is repairing the harm caused by life situations that are understood as a result of personal choices:

I used to play soccer, you know, at Chaca (a club). Her [his girlfriend's] boy is still playing. **Not me, I missed out** (...) And then when I was about 14 I got into drugs and all that stuff. Now I just play soccer with my friends, I play Thursdays and Saturdays. But **I plan to return because my dream was to become a football player ... I'm still thinking about what to do, I'm still thinking ... I do not know what to do**. (C., male, 17).

A way in which the possibility of reparation appears is through their own children. Maternity/paternity – as a potential or actual experience – helps restore painful life stories and provides new identities. In addition, this experience allows for a recovery of the notion of an ideal family by building their own.

Children promote a different experience, encouraging the desire of wellbeing and being “rescued” (in their own words, from drugs mainly). The construction of a different temporary nature is also promoted, which allows them to think about the future in terms of caring for and raising someone, looking forward to improving the way they were raised and transmitting experiences that serve as good examples.

Today I am thinking about finishing high school to **provide a future for my son, you get me? I do not want my son to live all day not having his mom in the house, working and being paid under the table** [without a contract, in precarious conditions, in the informal market] or ending up ...you know? I don’t want to fall... [in jail] (J., woman, 17).

“To give my son everything my parents did not give to me” is a recurring theme in this group. Children lead to the fantasy as well as expectation of creation and consolidation of one’s own family. They expect inclusion as well as acceptance and set conditions for new experiences for themselves.

The Future in Action, Step by Step

This category refers to a sequence of actions that can lead to a difference in daily aspects, focused on creating difference as opposed to repetition and doing something different for a diverse result of past and present events. In this transformed reality, specific actions such as studying, or not expressing hostility by physical aggression, prevail, namely acts that engage the possibility of anticipating the future and recognizing oneself as an active subject. It involves giving value to some aspects of reality that one does not wish to lose and that work as bridge to thinking of oneself doing/being something different in the future.

[What do you have in mind for next year?] To work, and I’m thinking about moving somewhere else. A place only for me and my children. And for the girls to continue in kindergarten. [...] I also plan to work in the morning, a couple of hours and then go to school in the afternoon. **But continue studying in school, because if I do not learn to read, it’s all useless.** If I go to work they will take advantage of me. So I should study, [...] because if you don’t know how to add up, you don’t know about money, or you can’t read they can take advantage of you, for example, when they pay what you worked, you do not know if they are paying you correctly [...] Or if they are you paying less. Or if you have to sign or something, and you do not know what it says, [...] **I like to study, even though it’s difficult for me, I really make an effort** because to tell you the truth, studying is really hard for me (B., woman, 20).

Present actions are meaningful and relevant if they can be included in a framework in which they acquire importance and the effort is justified. In the stories the future is built on action. It is not the goal that really matters but finding situations that enable new situations. That is to say, each step means a plan that enables and empowers other steps (plans, projects).

It is not easy for young people in vulnerable situations to establish and formulate bonds with socially valued objects. To think about the future implies sharing a “legitimate” representation that ties the project to a cultural and social value. For this reason, the question for the future is disruptive. In relation to future work, young people express a strong desire to obtain quality jobs, which contrasts negatively with their real experiences.

When they manage to identify a valuable situation (meaningful, “that is working”) in their current activities, the future appears as a horizon of greater opportunity. There is an emotional aspect, linked to positive meaning. Identifying a valuable situation of this type brings value to one’s own experience and contributes towards feelings of acceptance and sense of belonging. It is essential to feel included in order to be able to project into the future.

In terms of cognitive operations involved, a reflective process starts – “stop and think” – as opposed to acting on impulse. Plans become meaningful when different things happen in the process of deployment and implementation, which is also supported by social actors who accompany and reinforce these actions.

The future is not built in solitude, but woven and supported by a social network. As seen in the young people’s stories, the institutions in which they participate offer a context where they can build themselves up and develop as subjects. They can also see themselves in perspective and engage in a historical reconstruction process that affects the reconfiguration of their identities. These institutions offer the proper settings as well as stable and assisted guidance, which helps promote alternative life paths positively valued by young people (Aisenson et al., 2012, 2014).

14.7 Possible Interventions with Young People in Vulnerable Situations

Returning to the main question that is the focus of this article, guidance and counseling interventions may support personal, institutional and community projects that contribute to the construction of sustainable life paths based on decent work, as proposed by UNESCO.

To achieve this, it is a priority for the counselor to assume a post of responsibility and sustained commitment in the following aspects: (1) to accompany the construction of an identity from a narrative perspective, overcoming hegemonic models; and (2) to maintain an active role as mediator with other social actors.

14.7.1 Accompany the Construction of an Identity from a Narrative Perspective, Overcoming Hegemonic Models

It is deemed necessary to create proper spaces to help young people recover and value their personal and environmental resources. Also critical is empowering them to understand and use those resources for the construction and appropriation of cultural and symbolic capital, transferable to diverse contexts of inclusion. This task is crucial, particularly when the context is unfavorable since the meanings and representations that people construct about their opportunities are often affected by it,

thereby restricting their range of action. Sometimes this can give rise to a process of learned helplessness,² which hinders the visualization of personal resources and access to certain opportunities and changes, since they are already considered lost from the beginning.

Guidance and counseling should therefore address identity construction from personal narratives. It is important for socially vulnerable young people to recognize their uniqueness which enables diverse ways of building possible futures. In an environment filled with stigmatizing looks, it is imperative for them to be able to construct a positive version of themselves and understand that their obstacles are not merely due to individual circumstances, but also emerge from social situations.

Consequently, major objectives of this approach are to make critical reflections and considerations about the social representations of work as well as alter the nature of certain meanings that can perpetuate inequality and lack of opportunities. It is also necessary for the counselors to adopt an analytical stance to their practices and essential that they critically review the conceptions that, from the “policies of subjectivity”, underpin certain practices. In fact, it has been noted that even when ideas are formed with good intentions there are certain practices that, far from aiding the construction of sustainable paths, actually block the possibility of constructing valid narratives of personal stories.

For example, as we can see from our results, most public policies oriented towards vulnerable young people have the need to build projects as one of their main objectives. However, the method adopted by this order is usually presented in the form of an imposition that, far from helping and accompanying them towards decent inclusions, actually discredits and paralyzes young people (Aisenso et al., 2014).

We can observe in young people’s stories how they try to comply with society’s imposition of having to “build a project”, which they associate with being someone socially accepted and recognized. Many times they feel inadequate and lack the resources to satisfy these demands as they “have nothing against this mandate” and “can’t live up to what they think society demands”.

Yet, when young people manage to distance themselves from others’ expectations and take charge of their own history, a creative new personal construction appears. From this experience, young people can discover themselves as being day-to-day constructors of their own lives, capable of achieving things and providing a whole new range of possibilities. Accordingly, we accompany the co-construction of their life stories and projects with the purpose of creating new possibilities for inclusion focused on decent work.

Identifying their achievements, despite the constraints posed by the context, as well as building their futures step by step requires a legitimate social focus. The construction of this narrative, as a story of themselves and their own lives, is not an

²The learned helplessness is defined as a lack of motivation and failure to act after being exposed to an unpleasant event or stimulus, without having control over it. Individuals learn that they cannot control their environment and this may lead them to not consider the control options available to them (Dictionary of Psychology, American Psychological Association – APA, 2007).

individual circumstance since there are others involved in the process who enable, recognize and value those narratives.

Therefore, these processes are not only the result of personal development but only made possible if there is a network built from belonging to different institutional and community circles which provide support. This network is the foundation on which a valued world can be built which is why counselors must assume a leading role as agents of change and mediators between people and other social as well as institutional actors that enable and support their life narratives and paths.

In line with the current positions guided by social justice as a central aspirational value, we believe that scientific theories and professionals who carry out practices must depart from those theories that, with scientific value, attempt to explain social inequalities in terms of individual differences; for example, through the result of inadequate coping mechanisms, unresolved childhood conflicts or gender issues (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012). It is necessary to visualize that these differences must be understood in relation to the social structure.

14.7.2 Assuming a Mediating Role with Other Social Actors

Interventions with socially vulnerable young people in relation to their guidance, access, training and permanence in the labor market, as well as the incorporation into satisfactory social spheres, require the participation and involvement of actors in the community. Socio-community actions are promoted in an attempt to address socio-economic constraints, while it is necessary to recognize that these actions require public policies and understand that their achievements are not simple.

It is essential to help institutions create strategies that promote the development of sustainable life paths. We have identified that certain socio-educational experiences, carried out in institutions³ in which we have performed interventions, promote spaces for symbolic exchange, recognizing and rescuing the cultural and social idiosyncrasies of young people (Aisenson et al., 2012). These institutions have not only provided academic training but also identity-building spaces, favoring self-reflection and historization, setting the stage for the construction of sustainable life projects (Aisenson et al., 2014).

However, not only reflective and dialogic spaces are essential for the construction of sustainable life projects. The participation of young people in various social activities also creates conditions for the development of more valuable life narratives. In the aforementioned institutions we have found that their participation in meaningful activities favors valued life stories and positive perceptions of them-

³A primary school that receives homeless people; a government agency that designs and implements actions for young offenders; a non-governmental organization that accompanies young pregnant women in their maternity process; and school orchestras that seek to include vulnerable young people through art. See Aisenson et al. (2015), Bailac et al. (2015), Aisenson et al. (2013), Czerniuk (2016) and Valenzuela and Aisenson (2016).

selves and their futures. All these factors allow young people to imagine diverse alternative possibilities to those determined by their vulnerable conditions.

Interventions involving both these aspects need to be continuously monitored and sustained over time. They must be considered as gradual assisted processes in the development as well as construction of new meanings and identities.

14.8 Final Reflections

To answer the question that inspired this publication it was necessary to take the context in which we carried out our work as counselors into account. Argentina's current outlook sets a discouraging picture, reflected in the increase of poverty, destitution, unemployment and job insecurity. In addition, the country is experiencing a complex period of changes at political, economic and cultural levels, which are expressed in the rise of social conflicts and overall increased inequality. Although the objectives of UNESCO 2030 include the entire planet, the strategies must necessarily be particular, taking the specificities of each country into account and considering the different social groups that have diverse realities, possibilities, needs and expectations.

In this sense, contributing to the achievement of decent work and development of sustainable lives in vulnerable groups is presented as a central goal and challenge which forces us to generate new theories, concepts and interventions. These should aim to make the problems visible and propose alternatives that promote the inclusion of those who cannot fully participate in society.

Counseling activities therefore imply great responsibility and social commitment, as they are not solely oriented towards achieving professional lifelong learning but also defining and clarifying an ethical position that addresses the values of social justice and avoids the continuous recreation of inequalities. Consequently, it is fundamental, on the one hand, to promote the creation of public policies that provide specific responses and solutions. On the other hand, it is essential to raise awareness for the agents involved in the definition and execution of such policies regarding the effects that the phenomena of exclusion and marginalization cause in people's lives and identity construction.

Finally, guidance and counseling intervention strategies for social vulnerable groups require:

Concerning work with people:

1. Understanding the "step by step" approach towards a gradual construction of a life path.
2. Promoting critical reflection about oneself, possible futures, reality and context.
3. Proposing dialogue and narrative devices to help recover the subjective identity history with its cultural particularities; recognizing the present with its potential, resources and obstacles; and leading to the construction of anticipations of future and life projects.

4. Empowering the potential, resources and support levels of social actors involved in their lives.
5. Providing formal, sustainable and guidance mechanisms, in order to better establish affective, material and identity support.

In relation to our role as mediators between people and social institutions:

1. Identifying, exploring and articulating existing community and social resources to contribute to the full development of young people and the consolidation of their projects.
2. Promoting the active participation of different social actors and institutions to create coordinated networks, with clear and shared objectives.
3. Supporting the transitions and inclusion of individuals from these social groups.
4. Contributing to the creation of favorable material, social and community conditions so they can rehearse roles and realize positive experiences according to their cultural reality and identity.
5. Ensuring that the diverse actions are carried out by trained professionals that recognize and understand the reality of these young people, who have all the necessary tools to do so.
6. Assisting in the creation and strengthening of non-traditional educational, training, social and labor institutions that are able to understand diversity, thus allowing for the adequate construction of the identity of these young people.

Transversal to both:

7. Recognizing the social conditions that create inequality, vulnerability and their effects on individuals. Exercising the notion of diversity.
8. Helping deconstruct and alter the nature of social representations that tend to perpetuate the status quo as well as replication of inequality and social injustice.

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