

PEDAGOGICAL MEDIATION AND SUBJECT FORMATION IN SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE: REFRAMING EDUCATIONAL ORIENTATION BEYOND DECISION-MAKING

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a revised conceptual framework for school career guidance by distinguishing it from adult-oriented decision-making models. Building on Krivas' pedagogical understanding of guidance and extending an earlier conference contribution, it argues that school guidance should be understood as a formative educational practice rather than as a technical service for choice optimization. The article develops three interrelated dimensions: pedagogical mediation, subject formation and institutional responsibility. It further examines the ethical and political implications of guidance in relation to curriculum, inequality, normalization and professional judgment. Methodologically, the article argues that research on school guidance requires interpretative, longitudinal and discourse-sensitive approaches capable of capturing developmental processes that cannot be reduced to immediate outcomes. The proposed framework contributes to international debates by repositioning school career guidance within the educational mission of schooling and by resisting the instrumental reduction of guidance to employability.

KEYWORDS

school career guidance, pedagogical mediation, subject formation, educational power, curriculum

1. INTRODUCTION

School career guidance is often described through the vocabulary of choice, transition and employability. In many policy documents and institutional programmes, it appears as a support mechanism designed to help individuals select educational or vocational pathways by combining information, self-knowledge and planning. Such a definition is not without practical relevance; students do eventually face transitions, and educational systems have a responsibility to provide reliable information. Yet, when this decision-centred definition becomes the dominant epistemological frame for school guidance, it narrows the educational meaning of the practice and risks transforming guidance into a technique of early adjustment.

The present article develops a substantially revised and extended journal version of an earlier conference paper on school career guidance as educational practice [1]. Whereas the conference contribution focused primarily on the theoretical relevance of Spiros Krivas for rethinking school guidance, the present article broadens the argument by integrating curriculum, institutional power, social inequality, professional identity and research methodology. The aim is not merely to restate a previous position but to reconstruct it as a more complete framework for analysing guidance within schools.

The central argument is that school career guidance should not be treated as a simplified version of adult career counselling. Adult guidance generally addresses persons who are already socially positioned as decision-making subjects. School guidance, by contrast, concerns students whose aspirations, self-understanding and relationship to knowledge are still being formed. This distinction changes the function of guidance. It is not only a service offered at decisive moments; it is a pedagogical mediation embedded in the daily educational work of the school.

Krivas' contribution is decisive because it allows guidance to be located within an epistemology of formation rather than within a narrow logic of matching, prediction or optimization [2], [3]. This perspective does not deny the importance of information or choice. It argues, however, that choice has educational value only when it is prepared through reflection, dialogue, exploration and the gradual construction of meaning. In this sense, guidance becomes part of the broader pedagogical mission of schooling: helping students understand themselves, interpret possibilities and situate their future within social, cultural and educational contexts.

The article is organized in nine sections. First, it clarifies the limits of transferring adult career guidance models into school settings. It then presents the epistemological and pedagogical foundations of school guidance as formation. Subsequent sections examine mediation, curriculum, power, inequality, professional identity and methodological implications. The conclusion summarizes the contribution of the revised framework to international guidance theory and educational research.

2. LIMITS OF DECISION-CENTRED MODELS IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Decision-centred models have long structured the international field of career guidance. Their assumptions are familiar: individuals possess interests, values, abilities and preferences; guidance helps identify these characteristics; information about opportunities is supplied; and the individual makes a more rational and better adjusted choice. This logic is visible in trait-and-factor traditions, employability-oriented policies and several contemporary models that emphasize adaptability and self-management.

Career construction and life-design approaches have introduced important corrections to purely positivist models by emphasizing narrative, subjectivity and biographical meaning [4], [5]. Systems approaches have likewise made visible the interaction between individuals and contexts [6]. Nevertheless, even these more complex approaches are frequently mobilized in school policy through a language of transition management. Students are encouraged to become adaptable, informed and responsible for their future, while the institutional and pedagogical conditions of such responsibility remain insufficiently examined.

The problem becomes acute in compulsory and upper secondary education. Students do not encounter choices as fully formed autonomous subjects. Their preferences are unstable, exploratory and often dependent on family expectations, school experiences, peer cultures and social recognition. Asking them to decide too early may produce an appearance of clarity while leaving unexamined the processes through which their aspirations were formed. A premature decision may therefore be less a sign of autonomy than an effect of institutional pressure.

Decision-centred models also tend to evaluate guidance through immediate outcomes: declared choice, satisfaction, transition rates or congruence between interests and pathways. These indicators may be useful for administrative monitoring, but they do not capture what is specifically educational in guidance. The development of reflexivity, the capacity to question stereotypes, the transformation of one's relationship to learning and the ability to tolerate

uncertainty are slower and less visible processes. They require a different vocabulary of evaluation.

A school-based theory of guidance must therefore begin with a distinction between making a decision and being educated into the conditions of meaningful decision-making. The first can be treated as an outcome; the second is a formative process. The following sections argue that the second dimension is the proper object of school career guidance.

3. EPISTEMOLOGY OF FORMATION AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF KRIVAS

Reconceptualizing guidance as an educational practice requires an epistemological shift. In technicist models, knowledge in guidance is treated as information: data on occupations, educational routes, abilities, labour market trends and assessment results. The counsellor's role is to organize this information and to help the student apply it to a choice. Although such knowledge is necessary, it is not sufficient for educational guidance.

In an epistemology of formation, knowledge becomes meaningful only when it is pedagogically mediated. Information about a profession, for instance, does not have the same meaning for all students. It is interpreted through prior school experience, social background, imagined identity, family narratives and expectations of success or failure. Guidance therefore works not only with information but with the student's relation to information. The central question becomes: how does a student appropriate, question, resist or transform what is offered by the institution?

Krivas' work is significant because it places guidance within the pedagogical field rather than outside it [2], [3]. Guidance is not an external service attached to schooling; it is a modality of educational action. It participates in the formation of the person by supporting the construction of meaning, responsibility and self-understanding. This approach is particularly valuable for school contexts, where the student's future is not simply an external destination but a dimension of present educational experience.

This epistemological position also transforms the meaning of uncertainty. In administrative discourses, uncertainty is often viewed as a problem to be reduced: students must clarify their project, select a pathway and avoid dropout or misorientation. From a formative perspective, uncertainty is not necessarily a deficiency. It may indicate that the student is exploring, comparing, hesitating and gradually constructing a more complex understanding of self and world. The task of guidance is not to eliminate uncertainty prematurely, but to render it intelligible and pedagogically productive.

Such a position resonates with broader educational critiques of measurement and performativity. Biesta has argued that education cannot be reduced to measurable learning outcomes because it also concerns subjectification, socialization and the formation of judgment [9]. Similarly, guidance must be evaluated not only by its immediate utility but by the quality of the educational relations it establishes and the forms of subjectivity it makes possible.

4. PEDAGOGICAL MEDIATION: DIALOGUE, TEMPORALITY AND CURRICULUM

Pedagogical mediation is the practical core of school career guidance. It refers to the counsellor's capacity to create conditions in which the student can articulate experiences, compare interpretations and connect educational learning to future possibilities. Mediation is neither

simple advice nor psychological introspection. It is an educational relation structured by dialogue, institutional knowledge and ethical responsibility.

In guidance conversations, students often bring fragmented representations: a profession heard about at home, a subject they like, fear of failure, admiration for a relative, or a vague image of social status. The counsellor does not merely correct these representations by providing information. Rather, the counsellor helps the student examine how these representations were produced, what they imply and how they relate to school learning. In this process, the student begins to transform implicit images into objects of reflection.

Temporality is central. School guidance cannot be concentrated only at moments of transition, because formation unfolds over time. A single interview may be useful, but it rarely changes the student's relation to knowledge or future. Guidance becomes educational when it is inscribed in continuity: repeated conversations, classroom activities, curriculum links, encounters with professions, reflective writing and collective discussion. These practices allow students to revisit their representations rather than merely register a final decision.

Curriculum integration is therefore essential. If guidance remains an optional or peripheral service, it will mainly benefit students already capable of seeking support. If it is integrated into educational practice, all students encounter structured opportunities to reflect on work, knowledge, competence and social participation. Guidance should not be reduced to a separate module of vocational information; it should be articulated with history, language, sciences, civic education and the arts, because every discipline contributes to students' representations of possible futures.

The curriculum dimension also protects guidance from a narrow employability logic. Schools are not recruitment agencies, and students are not future workers only. They are learners, citizens and subjects in formation. Educational guidance must therefore help students think about the social meaning of work, the ethical dimensions of professional life and the relationship between personal aspiration and collective responsibility.

5. EDUCATIONAL POWER, NORMALIZATION AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Guidance is never neutral. It is exercised within institutions that classify, evaluate and distribute opportunities. Schools define legitimate success, rank students, validate certain forms of knowledge and make some futures appear more desirable than others. Guidance participates in this system and cannot pretend to occupy a purely external or benevolent position.

The concept of educational power is useful here. Power does not only repress; it produces categories, expectations and identities. A student may come to understand herself as academic or non-academic, realistic or unrealistic, suitable or unsuitable for a pathway. These judgments are rarely imposed through open coercion. They are often communicated through subtle forms of language, assessment, recommendation and institutional habit. In this sense, guidance may either reproduce normalization or open a space for critical reflection [11], [12].

The ethical challenge for the school guidance counsellor is not simply to be kind or supportive. It is to exercise professional judgment without transforming institutional expectations into destiny. A counsellor may legitimately draw attention to academic requirements, risks and constraints. Yet the counsellor must also help the student interrogate the meaning of these constraints.

Otherwise, guidance becomes a mechanism through which existing hierarchies are internalized as personal limitations.

This ethical dimension is especially important when students express non-linear or socially less valued aspirations. Educational guidance should not romanticize every aspiration, but neither should it immediately domesticate them into institutionally acceptable options. The pedagogical task is to examine possibilities, conditions, obstacles and meanings. In doing so, guidance can support a more mature form of autonomy: not the illusion of unrestricted choice, but the capacity to reflect on choices within real social and institutional conditions.

Ethics also concerns the management of uncertainty. Pressuring students to formulate a definitive project may create compliance rather than autonomy. Respecting uncertainty does not mean leaving students alone; it means accompanying them through uncertainty with appropriate information, questioning and support. This is one of the strongest reasons for understanding guidance as educational mediation rather than technical decision assistance.

6. SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND THE DEMOCRATIC FUNCTION OF GUIDANCE

Social inequality is not external to school guidance. It shapes the resources students bring to educational decision-making: knowledge of pathways, familiarity with institutional codes, confidence in speaking to adults, access to networks and family expectations. When guidance treats students as isolated decision-makers, it risks concealing these unequal conditions and attributing outcomes to individual motivation or ability.

Bourdieu and Passeron showed that schools may reproduce social hierarchies by presenting culturally situated forms of knowledge and confidence as neutral merit [10]. Guidance can participate in this reproduction when it assumes that students have equal access to information, equal legitimacy in projecting themselves into prestigious pathways and equal capacity to negotiate institutional expectations. In reality, the ability to imagine a future is itself socially distributed.

An educational approach to guidance must therefore include a compensatory and democratic dimension. It should make implicit pathways explicit, provide all students with access to information and dialogue, and create spaces where social constraints can be named rather than silently accepted. This does not mean reducing students to their social origin. On the contrary, it means helping them understand how background, opportunity and aspiration interact, so that their future can be constructed with greater reflexivity.

Guidance also has a collective dimension. If support is offered only to students who request it, inequality is likely to increase because the most informed families will use the service more effectively. Curricular and institutional integration can reduce this asymmetry by ensuring that guidance is not a privilege for the confident but a right for all students. In this perspective, guidance is part of the school's responsibility for educational justice.

The democratic function of guidance lies in widening the horizon of possibility without denying the reality of constraints. It prepares students not only to choose a course or occupation, but to understand the social world in which choices acquire meaning. This civic dimension distinguishes educational guidance from employability training and reconnects it with the broader purposes of schooling.

7. PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND TRAINING OF SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

If guidance is a pedagogical practice, the professional identity of the school guidance counsellor must be reconsidered. The counsellor is not simply a specialist in tests, occupations or information systems. Nor is the counsellor only a neutral facilitator of student preference. The counsellor is an educational professional who works at the intersection of knowledge, development, institution and subjectivity.

This role requires complex competences. Technical competence remains necessary: counsellors must know educational routes, institutional procedures and labour market information. However, technical expertise must be integrated with pedagogical judgment, relational sensitivity, discourse awareness and ethical reflexivity. The counsellor needs to hear not only what the student says, but how the student constructs meaning, where hesitation appears, which social norms are being internalized and which possibilities remain unspoken.

Training programmes should therefore move beyond a narrow accumulation of tools. Future school guidance counsellors need theoretical preparation in education, adolescence, sociology of schooling, curriculum, ethics and qualitative interpretation. They also need supervised practice in analysing guidance interactions. The ability to conduct a conversation is not reducible to interpersonal warmth; it involves professional attention to language, silence, reformulation, institutional positioning and the consequences of advice.

Continuing professional development is equally important. Guidance practices occur in changing policy environments, and counsellors are often asked to respond to contradictory expectations: promote employability, reduce dropout, support individual fulfilment, implement reforms and respect equity. Without spaces for collective reflection, counsellors may be pushed toward procedural compliance. Professional development should therefore include reflective analysis of practice, case discussion and critical engagement with policy discourses.

The recognition of school guidance as pedagogical mediation also requires institutional support. Counsellors cannot sustain formative work if their role is reduced to administrative management of transitions. Time, continuity, collaboration with teachers and access to students are not secondary conditions; they are constitutive of educational guidance.

8. METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH ON SCHOOL GUIDANCE

The conceptual reframing proposed in this article has methodological consequences. If guidance is understood as a formative process, research cannot rely solely on immediate outcome indicators. Surveys and transition statistics may identify general patterns, but they do not show how students construct meaning, how counsellors mediate representations or how institutional norms operate inside guidance interactions.

Interpretative methodologies are particularly appropriate. Discourse analysis can examine how options, abilities and futures are named in counselling conversations [14]. Narrative inquiry can reconstruct the evolution of students' self-understanding across time. Ethnographic approaches can situate guidance within school routines, classroom practices and institutional culture. Longitudinal designs can capture changes in aspiration and meaning-making that remain invisible in cross-sectional measures.

Research rigor in this field should not be confused with prediction alone. Qualitative rigor depends on transparency of corpus selection, explicit coding procedures, reflexivity, triangulation and theoretical saturation [15], [16]. When guidance conversations are analysed, researchers should attend to categories such as reformulation, encouragement, information delivery, questioning, normalization, opening of possibilities and closure of alternatives. Such categories make it possible to connect micro-interactions with broader educational issues.

A process-oriented methodology also allows researchers to study the difference between declared decision and formative development. A student may leave a session with a clear choice but little reflexivity, or with continuing uncertainty but a deeper understanding of possibilities. From an educational perspective, the second case may be more meaningful than the first. Research instruments must therefore be able to recognize partial, provisional and developmental forms of progress.

Finally, studies of school guidance should include the institutional voice: policy documents, curriculum frameworks, counsellor training materials and administrative categories. Guidance interactions are shaped by these discourses even when they are not explicitly mentioned. A robust methodology should connect the analysis of practice with the analysis of institutional conditions.

9. A COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR REFRAMING SCHOOL GUIDANCE

The distinction between decision-centred and educational-formation approaches can be summarized through several analytical dimensions. The following table is not intended as a rigid typology; rather, it clarifies the conceptual shift required when guidance is placed inside the pedagogical mission of schooling.

Table 1. Decision-centred guidance and educational guidance as formation.

Analytical dimension	Decision-centred model	Educational-formation model
Main purpose	Choice optimization and transition management	Formation of reflexivity, meaning and responsible orientation
Image of the student	Autonomous decision-maker with identifiable preferences	Subject in formation whose aspirations develop through experience
Role of information	Neutral data to be transmitted and applied	Content to be interpreted through dialogue and educational mediation
Treatment of uncertainty	Deficit to be reduced through clarification	Developmental condition to be accompanied and understood
Role of counsellor	Technical expert, adviser or facilitator	Educational professional exercising mediation and ethical judgment
Evaluation criteria	Immediate decision, congruence, transition indicators	Reflective development, widening of possibilities, critical understanding
Institutional risk	Adaptation to existing norms and employability pressures	Critical engagement with norms, inequality and curriculum

This comparative framework also shows why the school context cannot be treated as a preliminary version of adult counselling. The educational-formation model requires different

institutional arrangements, different training priorities and different research criteria. It also makes visible the political stakes of guidance: whether guidance simply adapts students to available pathways or helps them understand and transform their relationship to those pathways.

The proposed distinction should not be understood as an opposition between decision and education. Decisions remain necessary. The point is that, in school, decisions should emerge from formative work rather than replace it. Guidance becomes educational when it prepares students to inhabit their choices reflexively, rather than merely to state them administratively.

10.DISCUSSION: CONTRIBUTION TO INTERNATIONAL GUIDANCE THEORY

The framework developed here contributes to international guidance theory in three ways. First, it clarifies the specificity of school guidance. Much of the international literature uses concepts that circulate across age groups and institutional contexts. Adaptability, narrative identity and lifelong learning are valuable notions, but they require pedagogical translation when applied to schools. The concept of formation offers such a translation by emphasizing development, curriculum and institutional responsibility.

Second, the article reconnects guidance with educational theory. Guidance is often located between psychology, labour market policy and counselling practice. These fields are important, but they do not fully account for the school as an institution of formation. By situating guidance within schooling, the article foregrounds questions of pedagogy, power, inequality and democratic education.

Third, the proposed framework offers a more nuanced basis for evaluating guidance. Instead of opposing qualitative interpretation and practical utility, it argues that interpretative research is necessary for understanding how guidance becomes useful in an educational sense. The usefulness of school guidance should not be measured only by faster decisions, but by the quality of reflection, the widening of horizons and the capacity to connect personal aspiration with social understanding.

This discussion also underlines the continuing relevance of Krivas' work for contemporary debates. His pedagogical orientation makes it possible to resist both technicist reduction and purely individualistic accounts of choice. In a period when educational systems are increasingly governed by indicators, performance and employability expectations, such a perspective is not only theoretical but also critical.

11.CONCLUSION

This article has argued that school career guidance must be understood as a pedagogical practice of mediation and subject formation. Building on Krivas and extending an earlier conference contribution, it has shown that the school context requires a specific epistemological, ethical and methodological framework. Guidance in school is not merely the organization of choices; it is a formative process through which students learn to interpret themselves, knowledge, institutions and possible futures.

The revised framework presented here challenges the uncritical transfer of adult-oriented decision-making models into schools. It emphasizes pedagogical mediation, developmental temporality, curriculum integration, attention to educational power, sensitivity to social inequality and the professional formation of counsellors. These dimensions reposition guidance within the core mission of education rather than at its administrative margins.

Future research should examine guidance interactions empirically, paying close attention to language, institutional norms, student temporality and counsellor judgment. Such research can contribute to a more educationally grounded understanding of guidance, one capable of supporting students not only in choosing pathways, but in becoming reflective subjects within a complex social world.

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