

# SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE AS AN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE: EPISTEMOLOGICAL, PEDAGOGICAL, AND METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS BASED ON THE WORK OF SPIROS KRIVAS

## ***ABSTRACT***

*School career guidance is most commonly conceptualized as a decision-making support mechanism oriented toward facilitating educational and vocational choices through information, assessment, and planning. While such approaches may be effective in adult guidance contexts, their uncritical transfer to school settings raises substantial conceptual and pedagogical concerns. Schools are not spaces of decision optimization but institutions of education, formation, and socialization, within which developmental processes unfold over time.*

*This paper reconceptualizes school career guidance as an educational practice embedded in the pedagogical mission of schooling. Drawing on the theoretical work of Spiros Krivas, it advances an epistemology of formation in which guidance is understood as a mediated, developmental process supporting meaning-making, reflexivity, and students' evolving relationships to learning and future trajectories. The paper situates this framework within international guidance theory through critical dialogue with career construction, life design, and policy-driven approaches. It further examines guidance as a site of educational power, addressing normalization, regulation, and emancipatory potential, and outlines methodological implications for educational research that resist simplistic outcome-based metrics.*

## ***KEYWORDS***

*school career guidance; educational practice; epistemology of formation; pedagogical mediation; educational power*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In international educational discourse, career guidance is predominantly framed as a mechanism supporting educational and vocational decision-making. Dominant models emphasize rational choice, planning, and the alignment of individual preferences with labor market opportunities. These approaches conceptualize guidance as a technical process whose primary purpose is to optimize transitions and reduce uncertainty. While such models may be coherent in adult or post-compulsory education contexts, their direct application to school settings raises fundamental conceptual and pedagogical problems.

Schools are not neutral environments in which autonomous individuals simply choose among predefined options. They are institutions with a clearly defined educational mission, responsible for the intellectual, personal, and social formation of students. Within this institutional context, guidance cannot be reduced to a service facilitating decisions without distorting its educational meaning. Students, particularly during compulsory education, are not fully autonomous decision-makers but subjects engaged in ongoing processes of development, exploration, and identity construction.

This paper argues that school career guidance must be reconceptualized as an educational practice in its own right, embedded within the pedagogical mission of schooling. Rather than functioning as an auxiliary service activated at moments of transition, guidance constitutes a formative process accompanying students throughout their educational trajectories. This reconceptualization requires an epistemological shift away from decision-centered paradigms toward an understanding of guidance as mediation, interpretation, and meaning-making.

## **2. GUIDANCE VERSUS EDUCATION: FROM DECISION-MAKING PARADIGMS TO EDUCATIONAL FORMATION**

Decision-making paradigms have long dominated international research and practice in career guidance. These paradigms conceptualize guidance as a process designed to assist individuals in making optimal educational or vocational choices by identifying interests, abilities, values, and opportunities. Rooted in rational choice theory and positivist epistemologies, such models presuppose subjects capable of articulating stable preferences and engaging in deliberate, goal-oriented decision-making.

Within this perspective, the effectiveness of guidance is evaluated primarily through measurable outcomes, such as clarity of choice, congruence between individual characteristics and occupational pathways, and successful transitions. Guidance interventions are often episodic, concentrated around key moments of choice, and structured around standardized assessment tools and information delivery mechanisms.

In school contexts, however, these assumptions prove problematic. Students are not pre-constituted decision-makers but subjects in formation. Their interests, representations of work, and educational aspirations evolve through experience, interaction, and institutional mediation. When decision-centered models are transferred uncritically into school settings, they impose expectations of decisiveness and coherence that are developmentally inappropriate and pedagogically restrictive.

An educational perspective reframes guidance as a process oriented toward formation rather than choice. Uncertainty is not treated as a deficit to be eliminated but as a productive dimension of development. Guidance supports students in exploring possibilities, interpreting experiences, and developing reflexive relationships to learning and future trajectories, rather than forcing premature closure.

## **3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF FORMATION**

Reconceptualising school career guidance as an educational practice requires a fundamental re-examination of its epistemological foundations. Dominant guidance models are largely grounded in positivist and functionalist epistemologies that privilege measurement, prediction, and control. Interests, abilities, and preferences are treated as stable variables that can be identified, quantified, and matched with existing options.

The epistemology of formation articulated by Krivas represents a decisive rupture with these assumptions. Rather than grounding guidance in prediction and optimization, it emphasizes interpretation, subjectivity, and the progressive construction of meaning. Knowledge in guidance is not neutral information to be transmitted but pedagogically mediated content that acquires significance through dialogue and reflection.

Within this epistemological framework, uncertainty is understood as a constitutive element of educational development. Particularly during adolescence, uncertainty reflects ongoing processes of identity construction and exploration. Educational guidance respects this temporality and supports students in navigating uncertainty without prematurely resolving it through technicist interventions.

#### **4. THE STUDENT AS A SUBJECT IN FORMATION**

An educational conception of guidance presupposes a specific understanding of the student. Decision-centered models implicitly construct students as autonomous individuals capable of rational choice. Educational theory, by contrast, understands students as subjects in formation, whose identities, aspirations, and representations of the future are dynamic and context-dependent.

Schooling plays a central role in shaping these processes. Through curriculum, assessment, and institutional norms, schools structure students' relationships to knowledge, success, and possibility. Guidance participates in this structuring by mediating students' interpretations of educational experiences and future orientations.

Recognizing students as subjects in formation foregrounds the importance of developmental temporality. Educational development unfolds unevenly and non-linearly. Guidance practices that impose premature coherence risk foreclosing exploration and reinforcing normative expectations rather than supporting authentic development.

#### **5. PEDAGOGICAL MEDIATION IN SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE**

Pedagogical mediation constitutes the core mechanism of school career guidance understood as an educational practice. In technicist models, guidance is framed as a technical act focused on information delivery or assessment. An educational perspective, by contrast, understands guidance as a mediated process operating through dialogue, interaction, and institutional continuity.

Guidance conversations function as pedagogical spaces in which students articulate experiences, test interpretations, and construct provisional meanings. This dialogical dimension distinguishes educational guidance from advisory or counseling services oriented toward immediate decision-making. Mediation also entails an ethical dimension, as counselors must respect vulnerability, acknowledge uncertainty, and resist normative imposition.

#### **6. PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELORS**

Reconceptualizing guidance as an educational practice reshapes the professional identity of school guidance counselors. Within technicist frameworks, counselors are positioned as specialists in assessment and placement. An educational framework defines counselors as educational professionals whose expertise lies in mediation, interpretative judgment, and ethical responsibility.

Professional competence extends beyond technical tools to include relational sensitivity, contextual understanding, and reflexivity. This conception has significant implications for training, institutional recognition, and professional development, emphasizing pedagogical knowledge alongside guidance-specific expertise.

## **7. BIS. SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE, CURRICULUM, AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY**

If guidance is understood as an educational practice, its integration into curriculum and policy frameworks becomes essential. Marginalizing guidance as an auxiliary service undermines its formative potential. Curricular integration enables continuity, coherence, and equitable access to guidance for all students.

Educationally grounded guidance resists reduction to employability preparation. Embedded within curriculum, guidance retains a critical pedagogical function, enabling students to reflect on the social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of work, learning, and choice.

## **8. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

Reframing school career guidance as an educational practice challenges outcome-based evaluation models and calls for qualitative, interpretative research approaches. Formative processes such as reflexivity, meaning-making, and narrative construction resist simplistic metrics and require methodological pluralism.

Educational research must align methods with theory, prioritizing interpretative coherence, contextual sensitivity, and longitudinal perspectives over predictive accuracy.

## **9. EXTENDED INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

International literature on career guidance has developed along multiple trajectories, including career construction, life design, and policy-driven approaches. While these perspectives introduce valuable insights into subjectivity and adaptability, they often remain oriented toward individual adjustment or system efficiency.

Career construction theory emphasizes narrative meaning-making but frequently abstracts individuals from institutional educational contexts. Life design approaches acknowledge multiplicity and non-linearity but tend to position schools as preparatory spaces rather than formative institutions. Policy-oriented models emphasize employability and transition management, risking instrumentalization of guidance.

Against this background, Krivas' framework reasserts the educational responsibility of schools and positions guidance within pedagogical rather than economic logics.

## **10. SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE AND CURRICULUM PRACTICES**

Integrating guidance into curriculum affirms its educational nature. Guidance intersects with learning across disciplines, mediating students' relationships to knowledge, competence, and possibility. Curricular integration supports continuity, equity, and pedagogical depth, countering episodic and optional models of guidance provision.

## **11. EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS**

Educational policy frequently frames guidance as a tool for improving system efficiency, emphasizing measurable outcomes such as transition rates and employability. Such orientations constrain the educational potential of guidance by privileging short-term indicators over formative processes.

An educational framework challenges these constraints by asserting the primacy of pedagogical aims and advocating institutional autonomy, professional judgment, and ethical deliberation.

## **12. METHODOLOGICAL POSITIONING AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

Understanding guidance as an educational practice grounded in formation requires process-oriented research methodologies. Narrative inquiry, discourse analysis, ethnography, and longitudinal designs are particularly suited to capturing formative trajectories.

Rigor in educational research is defined not by prediction but by interpretative coherence, transparency, and theoretical saturation.

## **13. ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE AS AN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE**

Understanding school career guidance as an educational practice necessarily foregrounds its ethical dimension. Guidance in school contexts is not a neutral activity; it involves asymmetrical relationships, institutional authority, and normative assumptions about what constitutes a “good” educational trajectory. Ethical considerations therefore permeate every aspect of guidance practice, from the framing of options to the interpretation of students’ narratives and the exercise of professional judgment.

Decision-centered guidance models often obscure ethical issues by presenting choices as objective outcomes of assessment and information. In such models, counselors are positioned as neutral facilitators who simply help students identify the most appropriate option based on measurable criteria. However, educational research has repeatedly demonstrated that choices are never value-free. They are shaped by institutional expectations, social hierarchies, and implicit norms regarding success, failure, and legitimacy.

An educational conception of guidance makes these ethical dimensions explicit. When guidance is understood as a process of formation, counselors are no longer merely technicians but moral agents who participate in shaping students’ relationships to knowledge, work, and self-understanding. Ethical responsibility arises not from enforcing correct decisions but from supporting students’ capacity to reflect, question, and construct meaning in conditions of uncertainty.

One central ethical issue concerns the risk of normalization. Schools operate within systems that implicitly value certain pathways over others, often privileging academic success and linear progression. Guidance practices that align uncritically with these norms may contribute to the marginalization of students whose trajectories deviate from institutional expectations. Educational guidance must therefore resist the temptation to equate institutional conformity with individual success.

Ethical guidance also involves respecting students’ developmental temporality. Adolescence is characterized by exploration, ambivalence, and experimentation. Pressuring students to commit prematurely to fixed trajectories may undermine their capacity for self-discovery and learning. An educational approach recognizes hesitation and uncertainty as legitimate and pedagogically meaningful, rather than as deficiencies to be corrected.

Furthermore, ethical responsibility extends to the management of power relations within guidance interactions. Counselors possess institutional authority, symbolic capital, and access to privileged information. Exercising this authority ethically requires reflexivity and restraint.

Educational guidance does not impose futures but opens spaces for dialogue, allowing students to articulate doubts, contradictions, and aspirations without fear of judgment.

Finally, ethics in educational guidance cannot be reduced to individual professional conduct. It is embedded in institutional structures, policy frameworks, and resource allocation. Ethical practice requires institutional conditions that support continuity, professional autonomy, and reflective dialogue. Without such conditions, even well-intentioned counselors may be compelled to act in ways that contradict educational values.

#### **14. SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE, SOCIAL INEQUALITY, AND EDUCATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

A further dimension that reinforces the educational nature of school career guidance concerns its relationship to social inequality. Educational systems are not neutral arenas; they reproduce and, at times, amplify social stratification. Career guidance plays a critical role in mediating students' encounters with these structural inequalities, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Decision-centered models tend to individualize responsibility for educational outcomes. Success or failure is attributed to personal choice, motivation, or aptitude, while structural constraints remain largely invisible. Such models risk legitimizing inequality by framing unequal outcomes as the result of rational individual decisions rather than as products of social and institutional conditions.

An educational conception of guidance challenges this individualization. By situating guidance within the pedagogical mission of schooling, it recognizes that students' aspirations and choices are shaped by social background, cultural capital, and institutional positioning. Educational guidance therefore has a responsibility to make these influences visible rather than treating them as personal limitations.

This does not imply that guidance should prescribe "correct" choices based on social origin. Rather, it involves creating pedagogical spaces in which students can critically engage with the conditions that shape their educational opportunities. Guidance becomes a site where inequality can be discussed, interpreted, and problematized, rather than silently reproduced.

Educationally grounded guidance also has implications for equity of access. Optional or individualized guidance services often benefit students who already possess confidence, information, and support. Integrating guidance into everyday educational practices ensures that all students encounter opportunities for reflection and dialogue, regardless of background. In this sense, guidance functions as a compensatory educational practice rather than as a selective service.

Moreover, addressing inequality requires attention to institutional responsibility. Schools cannot delegate social justice concerns to individual counselors. An educational approach to guidance calls for coordinated action involving curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and policy frameworks. Guidance contributes to this collective effort by articulating the links between learning, opportunity, and social participation.

By foregrounding social inequality, school career guidance is reaffirmed as an educational practice with a civic dimension. It prepares students not only for transitions but for participation in society as reflective and informed subjects. This orientation distinguishes educational guidance from technicist models and aligns it with broader democratic aims of education.

## **15. HISTORICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION OF SCHOOL CAREER GUIDANCE IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION**

Understanding school career guidance as an educational practice also requires a historical and institutional perspective. Guidance did not emerge as a neutral or purely pedagogical activity; it developed within specific socio-historical contexts shaped by economic demands, educational reforms, and changing conceptions of the individual. Tracing this evolution clarifies why contemporary guidance practices remain marked by tensions between educational formation and administrative regulation.

In many European education systems, early forms of vocational guidance were closely linked to labor market needs and industrial organization. Guidance was initially conceived as a mechanism for allocating individuals to occupational roles in ways that served economic efficiency and social stability. Schools functioned as sorting institutions, and guidance supported this function by identifying aptitudes and directing students toward predefined pathways. Educational considerations were secondary to economic and administrative imperatives.

Following the expansion of compulsory education in the second half of the twentieth century, guidance gradually entered the school system as a distinct institutional function. This shift coincided with broader pedagogical debates concerning democratization, equal opportunity, and student-centered education. Guidance began to incorporate psychological and developmental perspectives, emphasizing interests, motivation, and self-concept. However, despite this apparent pedagogical turn, guidance often remained structurally separated from curriculum and teaching practices.

From the 1980s onward, European education policies increasingly reframed guidance in response to economic globalization and labor market volatility. Concepts such as adaptability, lifelong learning, and employability gained prominence. Guidance was mobilized as a policy instrument designed to support transitions, manage risk, and enhance system responsiveness. Within this policy context, guidance was expected to produce measurable outcomes aligned with employment indicators and economic competitiveness.

This policy-driven evolution contributed to a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, guidance was recognized as increasingly important within education systems. On the other hand, its educational content was progressively reduced, as practices were standardized and evaluated primarily through quantitative indicators. The school context was often treated as an early stage of a lifelong guidance continuum, rather than as a formative educational environment with its own pedagogical logic.

An educational conception of school career guidance challenges this historical trajectory. Rather than viewing guidance as an adaptive response to economic change, it reasserts the formative responsibility of schools. In this perspective, guidance is not merely preparation for future transitions but an integral part of educational experience in the present. It contributes to students' understanding of learning, knowledge, and social participation, rather than simply orienting them toward predefined destinations.

The theoretical contribution of Spiros Krivas can be understood as part of this critical reorientation. By grounding guidance in an epistemology of formation, his work resists the historical tendency to subordinate education to economic rationality. It emphasizes the autonomy of educational institutions and the ethical responsibility of schooling to support subject formation, not merely system efficiency.

Situating school career guidance within its historical and institutional evolution also reveals the limits of reform initiatives that focus exclusively on tools or structures. Without a clear educational framework, reforms risk reproducing existing tensions between pedagogical aims and administrative control. An educational approach requires not only new practices but also a redefinition of institutional priorities and evaluative criteria.

From this perspective, reclaiming school career guidance as an educational practice represents both a theoretical and an institutional challenge. It calls for a critical engagement with the historical legacies of guidance and a conscious effort to realign practices with the core purposes of education. Such a reorientation is essential if guidance is to contribute meaningfully to students' development rather than merely managing their trajectories.

## **16. CONCLUSION**

This paper has argued for reclaiming school career guidance as an educational practice grounded in an epistemology of formation. Drawing on the work of Spiros Krivas, it has challenged decision-centered and technicist models and proposed an alternative framework emphasizing mediation, reflexivity, and ethical responsibility. By re-situating guidance within the pedagogical mission of schooling, the paper contributes to international debates on education, guidance, and subject formation.

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