

Laura Nota interviews Prof. Sodano

1. As a researcher, which are the most important research studies that you are currently conducting in the field of vocational guidance and career counseling?

Currently, I am examining how children's personality, specifically interpersonal traits, or interpersonal styles as they are also known as, will develop in children and also how that will coincide with the development of interests and perceived competencies. I will present some of that, here, at the Conference. And also probably we'll be going to examine personality characteristics of teachers, because that has become a hot topic, you could say, in the States, and so to see what makes a successful teacher at the primary and secondary grade levels. There are other studies of course, but those are probably the most immediate and exciting at the moment.

2. How do you appraise the quality and amount of interaction between researchers and counselors in your Country?

Well, it could be better, certainly. It is our organizations that help facilitate some of that interaction, but unfortunately there does seem to be a separation, you know. As a University researcher I feel it is my obligation to try to work towards bridging that gap, so to apply to research, to get out into, say if it is for children, the local schools, to partner with the counselors who are working in the field. They have the day-to-day concerns and they always seek what works. They want to know what works. They may be not as interested in all the details that researchers are, but I find that when I take steps to interact with the clinicians in the field it is very beneficial to me as a researcher because it takes oneself out of the mind and into the real world problems that we are working for, the same goals. What I have learned is that there has to be something that is usable to the clinicians so it is a compromise at times to get the job done. But unfortunately I don't think there is as much of that happening as could be occurring. I don't know if this occurs in Italy, but certainly in the United States there seems to be quite a bit of gap and I think that both, if we want to call them sides, could probably do better. We could listen to each other a little bit better and when we do that we will see have the same goals.

3. Do you think career counseling can give a contribution (how important and to what extent) to the downsizing of the problems caused by the International socio-economic crisis?

I guess I would like to say I do believe that people will always have a choice. However, it may be that they might have to do something in the shorter term. Obviously to put food on

the table is important, you know, so as counselors we have to respect that. Yet, at the same time we can also think ahead. If you do encounter someone who is out of work there's often a certain desperation perhaps that's going on, that's involved in the situation. And I think because theoretically we are the ones who should know better we can be a little strategic in that, yes, we want to serve the economic needs problem, but also in some cases we can help make plans, to check out this other area, or maybe this is the time to go back to school, or present some options, but realize they may not be ready for that now. So we need to be flexible, I think. As a vocational psychologist, I don't do interview skills; I don't do résumés and things like that. That's not my expertise. I tend to focus more on what a psychologist would do. I think as counselors we can make a unique contribution because we do have the counseling skills which would make us different than simply going to a career coach, if you will, or someone who is training clients to network just simply to get a job. We could certainly help with that, too, but we also bring unique skills that can hopefully improve the quality of life as well.

4. Which kind of training and what professional competencies should vocational guidance/career counselors possess?

In the United States we have the National Career Development Association (NCDA). If we are talking of counselors, we have the American Counseling Association as well, and there's some overlap with their competencies. They do a pretty good job of saying what all the domains are, but it is usually overwhelming for students when they see all that. It really takes some time to go through them and understand why they are important, but I do believe in them. For instance, we have individual counseling skills, group counseling skills, because you may find yourself in group situations, and as someone who studies assessments I certainly think that that is quite important skill to have as well. I want to add in basic psychometrics and to understand how to use the assessments together with the individuals counseling skills and group skills also to create a relationship to help you to deliver the assessment results; there is no such a thing as assessment in a vacuum...it is a very personal act as well. Those are all equally important competencies. At the University of Buffalo in our department we make a serious effort to combine those areas and show why that is important. It is not just one or the other, but using the assessments for some objective guidance during counseling. Another thing I will add is technology, use of technology, the Internet, that is, informational resources. Using these other skills that you have acquired in being a counselor and using assessments, but how then the clients can use them, how they could access information. In a sense we really teach that process of using

resources to the clients and we must have competencies in doing that, know where the job information is. So, they have their interest profile and now what? Today everything is online so there is no excuse not to do this.

5. What should future research in this sector focus on?

Well, I would say children, definitely. They are important, and we are beginning to feel the importance of focusing on children. We made progress there in vocational interests, competencies, also with respect to personality. These are important things that should be focused on. I also see that we are quite good at helping someone to get into a field or with the goal of choosing a field and then the preparation that is involved in that field, but we probably do not pay as much attention to within a profession. So what happens when people are in those careers and perhaps they want to make a change, or if they lose a job? We have to research how we can transfer those skills, how we can better connect people who were happy with their field, but lost their job. They want to go back to it but there is now a separation from their organizations and they might have to go to a new organization and that exact job may not be there, but several related ones are and a sort of compromise can be made. I don't think we understand that process as well as we should so future research can look more at within-profession interests, skills, things like that.