

A skill that transcends time - willingness to learn

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My name is Doina Popescu, and I have been a school counsellor in a school in Bucharest (Romania) since 2016. I work with children aged 6 to 14 years. Previously, I worked in a high school in Constanța, with teenagers aged 14 to 19, as well as with adults of all ages. For short periods, I have also provided counselling to young children aged 3 to 5 years, as well as to their parents.

In Romania, the tasks of a school counsellor are very diverse. They work with children as well as with adults (parents, teachers), in individual or group sessions, and through intervention programs centered on identified needs. The fields of intervention are broad: self-awareness, emotional management, learning management, career planning, and quality of lifestyle.

A school counsellor also supports school activities related to violence/bullying prevention, as well as the integration of students with disabilities.

From June 14 to 18 June 2025, I participated, along with 12 other school counsellors from Bucharest, in the activities organized within the CAREERS 4.0 Project in Larnaca (Cyprus).

One of the key ideas derived from the participants' discussions was related to the **18 competencies necessary for success in careers within the 4.0 industries**

in the labor market:

communication, teamwork and collaboration,

intercultural

competencies, leadership

skills, organizational skills,

problem-solving, creativity

and innovation, willingness

to learn, stress tolerance

and resilience, ethical

competencies, emotional

competencies, adaptability

and flexibility,

entrepreneurial

competencies, digital competencies, literacy competencies, mathematical skills (working with numbers), physical/manual skills, green competencies, and environmental awareness.





Willingness to learn is a competency that concerns me.

In trying to identify the most suitable strategies and methods for counseling students, I inevitably reflected on what willingness to learn means for me.

A brief review of theoretical aspects has been very useful.

Willingness to learn is a characteristic of all people exposed to change and uncertainty, who need to adapt quickly to be evaluated as professionals in the context of the industrial world (Burchell et al., 1999). In a study conducted in 2016 in China, a country that holds supremacy in goods production (30% of global production), 83% of responding students highlighted a very high level of willingness to learn (Huang et al., 2016).

Willingness to learn underpins the learning behavior that is necessary to face the challenges of our era. The accelerated complexity of science and technology demands that each person acquire a broader perspective of thinking, increased self-confidence, mental flexibility (Carillo et al., 2012), and high learning outcomes (Ishigoru, 2018). Currently, AI-generated learning tools are available; however, the issue that arises is how we cultivate willingness to learn since not everyone possesses it. Some people feel satisfied with existing conditions or feel unable to obtain useful information for themselves (Eekelen et al., 2006).

Willingness to learn is a psychological state that continues with the action of seeking information, accompanied by the need to understand various things (Baker et al., 2002; Wößmann, 2010). The individual does not want to stagnate; they want to change into a better version of themselves. Willingness to learn refers to professional competencies as well as education in a broad sense. For some specialists (Oosterheert and Vermunt, 2001), failure in the educational act is caused by the inability of teachers to awaken in students the desire to see phenomena from new perspectives, different from those taught.

Willingness to learn is different from the ability to learn. The ability to learn is based on reflecting on a situation, formulating learning objectives, utilizing learning resources, and transferring information (Onstenk, 1997).

Willingness to learn is not synonymous with interest or motivation for learning. It refers to the situation where a person becomes more receptive and willing to make a greater effort when they are interested (Carillo, 2012). This leads to focused attention, perseverance, and emotional involvement.

Willingness to learn is related to other aspects that influence success in learning: independent learning, self-esteem, and respect for the achievements of others (Eekelen, 2006; Carrillo, 2013).

Willingness to learn can lead to a favorable attitude towards learning. From a psychological perspective, an attitude has three components: cognitive, affective, and volitional (Hurlock, 2003).

The volitional component gives behavior a personal, directed, planned, intentional, proactive, and goal-oriented aspect. In the learning process, success is determined by how a person directs and self-regulates it, as well as by how the person manifests their will. The volitional component of the attitude supports the person to control their knowledge, motivation, and emotions (Kivinen, 1997).

Two important aspects related to will are known: it develops from childhood and can be trained, regardless of age. Huitt (1999) explains three components of will in relation to motivation: direction, enthusiasm, and perseverance. The direction has five aspects:

- (1) awareness of one's own needs;
- (2) awareness of one's own abilities;
- (3) the desire to make choices;
- (4) goal setting; and
- (5) creating learning plans (Huitt, 1999).

Thus, willingness to learn can transform motivation into learning behavior. When a person manifests their willingness to learn, they make a decision: either they follow their motivation and engage in learning activities or they choose other motivations that do not lead to learning activities (Hamade et al., 2011).

Enthusiasm is based on the need for self-development and self-determination. Both needs can be amplified by self-esteem (McCombs and Whisler in Huitt, 1999) and self-confidence (Hamade, 2011).

Perseverance represents the persistence of the person in fulfilling initial commitments. Perseverance is influenced by achievement motivation, hope, self-esteem, and the experience of failure (Zakay, 2004). Perseverance is characterized by: the existence of learning goals, how the person perceives the possibility of a better future and the desire to achieve it, and the desire to please the teacher or influential individuals (Eekelen et al., 2006; Hamade, 2010).

Therefore, willingness to learn represents an individual's willingness to commit to learning. There is a connection between motivation, commitment, practice, and willingness to learn in any learning behavior. The fundamental factor in willingness to learn is will, through direction, enthusiasm, and perseverance. Willingness to learn is determined by internal and external factors.

Internal factors relate to individual characteristics and the person's attitudes. External factors relate to the environmental, family, and school context.

Bolhuis and Simons (1999) consider willingness to learn is influenced by: the ambition to try new things, openness to experience and others, proactivity, attributing successes and failures, asking questions, and respecting the learning process and results (Eekelen, Vermunt, and Boshuizen, 2006). Anghelache (2013) believes that the factor that decisively influences willingness to learn is attitude. Attitude can change every aspect of a person's life. If a negative attitude is not changed, then a student may not continue their education beyond what is necessary. Changing students' negative attitudes towards learning is a process that involves identifying the factors that determine negative attitudes and using that information to produce change.

Zakay, Ellis, and Shevalsky (2014) argue that the determining factor for willingness to learn is an experience with negative outcomes. The results of negative experiences are positively correlated with the will to learn.

Sáez (2018) states that students with a high willingness to learn will show confidence in their ability to regulate their learning process and will attribute the causes of their success mainly to effort. Regarding the attribution of failure, they will not consider external factors as being responsible.

Manus, Ragab, Arisha, and Mulhall (2016) describe the external factors that determine willingness to learn. Family factors include the father's level of education, family resources, and the distance between home and school. Although the school factor influences the increase in willingness to learn, it is still not explicitly known which factors influence the school environment.

In organizations, Manus et al. (2016) analyzed willingness to learn. The factors influencing willingness to learn are infrastructure and leadership. A high willingness to learn can influence institutions to become more innovative, more developed, and better prepared to accept change (Burchell et al., 1999; Rainsbury et al., 2001, 2002; Carillo et al., 2012; Gorges et al., 2013).

The quality of an institution depends on the quality of the training of the individuals working in that institution. From this perspective, the experience of the Careers 4.0 project in which I participated in Larnaca led me to the following useful reflections in my practice as a school counsellor:

- How do I act to stimulate students' processes related to identifying their learning needs?
- What counseling methods do I use to support students' perseverance in the learning process?
- What factors can influence students' enthusiasm regarding the act of learning?
- How do I support a student in creating and applying an effective learning plan?
- How do I accompany a student with negative attitudes towards learning so that they can develop their self-confidence?
- What methods can I apply when working with teachers to stimulate their own reflections on willingness to learn?



These reflections were also stimulated by the context in which the professional mobility took place. Almost similarly to my hometown (Constanța), Larnaca has experienced strong Greek, Persian, Egyptian, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian, Turkish, and British influences.

Perhaps that is why I experienced such profound joy during this experience: strolling through narrow streets with houses so similar to the one where I grew up, tasting wonderful local dishes full of unknown flavors, yet at the same time, so familiar, on beaches where the tranquility of summer days was not disturbed by tourists, and in discussions with friendly locals eager to share the history and traditions of these places.

In the company of my colleagues, under the unexpectedly gentle sun in June, walking through this vibrant and surprising city, Larnaca taught me that origins can be defining for who a person becomes, and that the future can be full of opportunities.

Τα λέμε σύντομα, Λάρνακα! (See you soon, Larnaca!)

Resources

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